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"I WILL TAKE MY GRANDDAUGHTER TO DINNER."

ALMOST WON;

Or, FOR HER FATHER'S SAKE.

BY HARRIET IRVING.

CHAPTER I.

A MOONLIGHT ADVENTURE.

"I'll canter on, grandpapa, now that we

are in sight of the lodge gates, because I have so many letters to send this evening."

"Very well, my dear Effie. But what occasions all this letter-writing to-day?" asked, smilingly, the fine old gentleman, who, with a smart groom behind him had just turned an angle of the road which brought them in sight of Glenwood, the romantically-situated, picturesque, and noble mansion which was their country home.

"Dear grandpapa," answered Effie, "have you forgotten what to-morrow is? It is Valentine's Day. And so I have innumerable valentines to send off to my cousins and friends of all ages. Now, if I ride on, I shall gain five minutes; so good-by for the present."

She smiled as she looked affectionately back at her grandfather, waved her hand, then gave her mare the rein, and soon became lost to view in the undulating ground which lay between the entrance to the Glenwood grounds and the large house whose rows of deep-set windows were now flooded with gorgeous rays of the setting sun.

The weather was inclined to be frosty; but it was very fine for this time of the year, and the hale old gentleman of seventy, with his lovely granddaughter (now turned eighteen) had enjoyed a pleasanter ride than was usual at that season.

Vigorous and handsome still, the Honorable Stuart Lane looked as if he had many years of health and life before him.

He had had troubles in past days, but they were healed over. His dear old wife was still with him; and, though he had lost all his children, Euphemia, the only child of the son he had buried years ago, was as a daughter to him now.

Though the old man belonged to a good family, he was poor—very poor; but this trouble was counterbalanced by the fact that Glenwood and its wide acres had been left to this devoted granddaughter, Effie. It was now about fourteen years since they had come to live in Glenwood, on the death of Effie's godfather, and the girl could scarcely remember any other home.

Forthwith, distant relatives, and very distant friends and acquaintances, who would certainly never have remembered the existence of little Effie but for this undreamed-of good fortune of hers, vied with each other in courting her favor and winning a smile from her cheerful countenance.

In a moment, her grandfather's family, who had neglected their poor relative, Mr. Stuart Lane, remembered their before-forgotten relative, and invitations flowed in on him without number.

Miss Effie, on her introduction into society, found herself surrounded by a host of consins of all degrees of consanguinity, and countless acquaintances.

Her one season out had been short, but very gay—short, because she preferred the society of her grandfather and grandmother to that of the crowd of flatterers eagerly pressing round her, and because she feared that New York did not suit them at their age so well as the fresh winds which blew over beautiful Glenwood. And this was how it happened on the eve of Valentine's Day she

found herself riding in the country instead of being located in New York.

But she was shortly going to town in time for the annual Charity Ball (which was to be held in March), after which she was to enjoy all the gayeties of the city till the first of June. But Euphemia Lane felt no impatience for society distractions. Completely happy in herself and in the present, she let the future take care of itself.

Effie had dismounted in a moment, as she pulled up at her own door; and then saw that a mounted groom was holding two saddle-horses in front of the mansion.

"How tiresome! Grandmamma has visitors. I shall never get my valentines put up in time for the mail!" thought Effie, as a servant came hurrying out to take her horse; and she passed through the massive doorway.

"Mrs. Lane begged you would go to her in the library, if you please, miss, as soon as you came in. Mrs. Fulcombe has called, and was disappointed to find you were out."

Euphemia never slighted her grandmother's wishes, so she went at once to greet old Mrs. Fulcombe, who still took an occasional canter on a spirited thoroughbred.

"Here you are, dear?" cried Mrs. Lane, as Effie entered.

"I am so delighted to see you, if only for a moment!" cried the old lady, rising quickly. "I want to reintroduce you to my nephew, Sydney. You used to dance with him when you were a little girl, and he was a big boy."

Effie did not at all care for Mrs. Fulcombe; but as she made a graceful recognition of the nephew, Sydney, was conscious that she received a favorable impression. Something about him, careless, noble, and free, struck a sympathetic chord in the young girl's heart.

They exchanged a few words—a very few—for Fulcombe Lodge was four miles distant from Glenwood, and the February day was closing in; and soon the old aunt, who was still so expert a horsewoman, and her handsome nephew made their adieu, and took their departure.

Effie sat down in her riding-habit, exclaiming, "I shall never do it!—never make the mail, I mean! No, thank you, grannie, dear; I won't have any tea; I've no time to drink it!"

In eager haste, Effie went on inclosing enchanting and costly remembrances of Valentine's Day to sundry friends and acquaintances. It took her more time than she had calculated on, and when, at length, her task was finished, she found with dismay that it lacked but half an hour of the time for the mail to go out.

"How vexatious!" cried she, starting up. "But we must send into Tilford. It doesn't take long to ride into Tilford."

"My dear Effie," said her grandmother, "it is four miles off. No one could ride four miles in a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes."

"I could!" cried Effie. "See, I have my habit on! Let them bring round Mayflower!"

Mayflower was her favorite horse.

"Send a groom; but he will never get there in time," urged Mrs. Lane.

"He must follow me," said the young heiress.

There were a few more remonstrances from the old lady and gentleman (all overcome by the girl) while Mayflower was being brought round.

The moon was at the full, the country road a good one, and Effie was a capital horsewoman. The old coachman himself should attend her. Why not let the dear girl go, as she had set her heart upon it?

So the dear girl went. How exhilarating it was flying along under this brilliant moon on this calm evening! Effie did not often get such a ride, and was charmed with it.

She drew rein before the post-office in Tilford as the clocks were striking seven.

The clock had not made the last stroke of seven as, breathless, she made her way within the post-office.

"Am I in time?" asked she, her beautiful countenance expressing the anxiety that she felt.

"Well, miss, we'll take them," answered the postmaster, recognizing the young lady from Glenwood.

"Oh, thank you—thank you!" cried Effie.

"Miss Lane! Is it possible? Have you flown here?" asked some one at her side.

And looking round, she saw Mrs. Fulcombe's handsome nephew, Sydney, whose acquaintance she had made some hour or so ago.

Effie glanced up at him and smiled, and perhaps she blushed a little, too, as she met the gaze, which betrayed admiration.

"I came to—to make sure of getting my valentines posted," she said.

"For which you have ridden four miles by moonlight," he answered.

"It is delightful!" cried Effie.

"Yes; what a moon! It makes me think of what moonlight can be at San Diego. My regiment was stationed there for a time, you know."

"Ah, that must have been charming! I know the sunsets on the Pacific Coast are world-renowned. I suppose by moonlight it is equally enchanting!" remarked Effie.

The young man had it in his heart to say that he felt the magic of enchantment now, for the first time, in her beautiful presence; but it was not for *him* to utter soft speeches to this girl, who was the owner of Glenwood, for though rich Mrs. Fulcombe's nephew, he himself was very poor.

No doubt his aunt was angling to give him the chance of winning a rich bride in taking him to Miss Lane's that afternoon; but Sydney Fulcombe was not the man to angle in that manner.

He unconsciously smothered a sigh as he replied to Effie's last remark. "To tell the truth, the other coast beats us in the quality of its moonlight."

"I thought so," said Effie. "Good-by, Mr. Fulcombe. You make me wish to see moonlight in California."

Then, assisted by Sydney, Miss Lane was reseated on her horse, and about to gallop gayly homeward, when it was found that one of Mayflower's shoes was very loose.

"Oh, dear, what shall we do now?" cried Effie.

"I must lead Mayflower to the blacksmith's, if you please, miss," said the old servant, who had escorted her.

"And where is the blacksmith's?" asked Effie.

The blacksmith in Tilford lived just out of the town, nearly half a mile away, and was, alas! a tipsy fellow, not always to be got hold of when wanted.

The old coachman said something of this to his young mistress.

"You will allow me to go with you to this troublesome personage? In fact, I could not leave you to his mercy without doing my little all to overawe him, if he is in need of it," said Sydney.

"You are very kind," replied Effie, not much liking the prospective visit to the blacksmith's.

The young man dismounted, and walked by her side, when she had resisted his proposal that she should wait at the post-office or at some store, while Mayflower was taken to the forge.

"No, no; it would be like deserting Mayflower," she answered.

And so they went together through the moonlighted streets.

Arrived at the blacksmith's, they found that that burly individual was at a neighboring tavern, so the young lady remained with Mr. Fulcombe outside the smithy, while her servant went to urge his instant attendance.

After the lapse of some minutes the blacksmith appeared from the roadside tavern, where several men were loitering in the porch.

CHAPTER II.

WHO WAS HE?

BUT now Effie was seized with sharp anxiety as to what her grandfather and grandmother would feel at her delay.

"Hardman," said she, aside, to the old servant; "go home at once, and explain that there is nothing wrong; that I shall follow you directly. Indeed, I hope to overtake you."

"Very well, miss, if those are your orders. But I must make bold to say that Mr. Lane wouldn't like you to be left alone here at this time o' the evening, miss."

"But I am not alone." She turned with vivacity to Sydney. "May I count on your kindness to remain here a few minutes longer?"

"I am delighted to be of the slightest service. And if you were to refuse my escort to Glenwood I should feel most unhappy," answered he.

"Oh, indeed—indeed, Mr. Fulcombe," protested Effie, "I could not tax your good nature to that extent! It is just your own dinner hour, and—"

"You would not be taxing me in any way; and as to dinner, my aunt and uncle dine out to-night," he rejoined, with a smile.

"But I cannot take you all the way back to Glenwood when you have so lately been there, too."

"As have not *you* ridden out twice to-day? Besides" (with another smile), "I happen, also, to have a fancy for riding by moonlight."

The old servant, Hardman, seeing how things were going, had touched his hat and ridden off at a quick pace, leaving the young man and the young lady virtually alone in the quiet country by-street.

The blacksmith, disturbed from his potations, was awkward, surly, and slow. The group of noisy men round the small roadside tavern, became more tumultuous in their disputations, and Effie was but too glad of Sydney Fulcombe's presence.

"I don't know what I should have done without your kind escort," said she, gratefully.

"It is I who feel honored," he replied, in accents low and musical. "A short time hence, when I rejoin my regiment in the West, this hour with you will be something for me to remember." And involuntarily he sighed.

"Then you mean to return to the West?" she asked.

"I must. But it is being in exile to be so far from home."

There was a moment's silence, which he broke by remarking more lightly, "So you

approve of the pretty custom of sending valentines, Miss Lane?"

"Yes. At least, I always send and receive a great many. But most of those I dispatch go to baby cousins, and boys and girls at school."

"Ah, I see!" rejoined Sydney. "In my ignorance, I have connected valentines with Cupid."

"Oh, I always think he has but a scant share in them, generally!" laughed Effie.

How fairy-like she looked in the moonlight as she stood—her habit gathered up in one hand, which also held her riding-whip—her young, happy face smiling up at him, her slender, dark-robed, graceful figure lighted by the glow from the forge.

"As to valentines," continued she, "I have a very unusual one every year. It arrives most punctually every fourteenth of February in the shape of a letter from a very dear old friend of my father's, whom I have never seen. You cannot think the interest I feel in this old gentleman's yearly epistle. Every Valentine's Day I hope he will tell me that he is coming back to America, but something always occurs to prevent it. He has such bad health that he is obliged to live abroad."

"Indeed!" remarked Sydney, smiling. "It sounds romantic and interesting. But *you* might go and see him in the course of your travels."

"Oh, I should go directly; but, you see, my dear grandfather and grandmother are both turned seventy, and it would be impossible to go abroad without them; so we never travel much. Now, this old friend of my father's goes to the most unheard-of places—such as China, Morocco, Lapland; nay, once he spent part of the autumn in Iceland."

"A strange place for an invalid to resort to," rejoined Sydney.

"Yes; but he declares that sea-voyages and fresh scenes do him good. He writes to me only once a year; but he promises faithfully to come to Glenwood before he dies. I lost my own father seven years ago, and my first letter to his friend was a very sad one. It was I who began the correspondence."

She uttered a soft sigh, and continued:

"*This* year I shall have more than a letter. He is to send his son to see us all at Glenwood. We have only lately known that he had a son."

His son! Sydney Fulcombe already experienced a curious pang, which could be nothing but jealousy.

"I received my valentine in advance *this* year by this afternoon's mail," Effie went on lightly. "We are all so pleased that we shall be able to learn something more definite about this dear old friend, of whom my own

father thought so affectionately, and who yet seems unreal to us, because we have never seen him, never receive more than the one yearly letter on Valentine's Day."

"And from what part of the world does this young gentleman come to greet you?" asked Fulcombe, drawing nearer to Effie's side.

"He has been in all parts of the world, but received his education chiefly in England," answered she. "He wrote that he would bring us his father's portrait, lately executed by a very good Belgian artist."

"He is a fortunate man to arrive with such credentials at Glenwood."

Effie blushed a little under the moonlight. What might this speech mean? But she would not suppose it to mean anything, and went on rapidly, that the pause in their conversation might not become embarrassing.

"I am not fond of judging people beforehand, I assure you, Mr. Fulcombe. But in this particular case, how can I help forming a favorable opinion in advance? My father was not one to contract a friendship so intimate unless he had seen deeply into the character of the man he so loved and trusted. On his death-bed"—her voice took a softer tone—"he enjoined me to remember that friendship, and never refuse a kindness to Jaspar Bernard. I promised solemnly from the depths of my heart, and the whole scene is as fresh to me as if it had happened yesterday though it occurred seven years ago."

"We do not forget such scenes," murmured the young man, thinking at the same time that he foresaw the result of this friendship between the two fathers—namely, that the younger Mr. Bernard would end by winning the love of the heiress of Glenwood.

He became possessed with a keen desire to behold this fortunate individual, though all the time telling himself that it could matter nothing to him. He could never hope to gain the affection of the fair being by his side. A little hence he would have taken up life again amid the Western wilds; it was well that he should not dwell too fondly on this glimpse of home-life on his native shore.

By this time Mayflower was ready to carry his mistress home again. The blacksmith led her horse to the roadside; Sydney hastened forward to reseal the young heiress, then vaulted into his own saddle, and he and she rode off toward Glenwood.

As they passed the tavern, Effie noted a hired vehicle drawn up before it, and a young man standing within the open doorway, drinking, probably, a glass of ale.

But she soon left the town of Tilford behind her, and her spirits were radiant as the

moonlight as she cantered on with her companion.

There were two roads to Glenwood, both nearly of the same length. Effie took that to the right.

"You must not refuse to come in and dine with us, Mr. Fulcombe," said she cordially. "My grandfather will scold me if I take any denial."

"You are too kind," stammered the young man; "but indeed I will not trespass to-night on your hospitality."

"And why not?" asked Effie. "You have had a long ride; your horse wants dinner as well as yourself. Mr. and Mrs. Fulcombe are out, and grandmamma will be so glad to thank you for all you have done on my behalf."

"It has been a very sincere pleasure," said he, with warmth; "and I cannot be ungracious enough to say no to the kind offer you repeat."

"Nor deny myself such happiness," he might have added, if he had spoken his thoughts aloud.

"I am so glad!" said Effie simply.

At a rise in the ground they both slackened rein for a moment, and in the stillness of evening heard the noise of wheels. Just at this part of the way the two roads joined; and a sort of open wagon, with two men in it, came up with the equestrians.

"Hi!" bawled one of them; "my fool of a driver doesn't know the shortest way to Glenwood. Will you tell me how I shall get there quickest, or I shall lose my dinner, I reckon?"

Effie was riding in the shadow cast by the tall trees along the wayside. The speaker had heard the clatter of horses' hoofs, and saw some one mounted, but could not distinguish by this light what manner of person it might be.

"To the left, I suppose," replied young Fulcombe, sparing Effie the answer.

"You *suppose*?" ejaculated the other, scornfully—"you only *suppose*! Do you live hereabouts, my fine fellow, and not know the roads of the country?" Then to the driver, "Get on! I want to arrive in time for dinner!"

The man who held the reins gave them a jerk; the young bear he was driving muttered an oath; and as Sydney and his companion fell purposely behind, the vehicle was soon ahead of them.

"Glenwood! What could that ill-bred man want at Glenwood, Mr. Fulcombe? And he talked about arriving in time for dinner!" said Effie.

"He could not be among your circle of acquaintances, Miss Lane," replied Sydney.

"Oh, no! But you heard what he said? And do you know that I happened to observe that very person drinking at the tavern near the forge as we rode by? His wagon was waiting outside. I hope the gardener, or our nice old coachman, has no friend of his description."

"The person who asked the way just now was quite a young man, and evidently a stranger," returned Fulcombe.

"Yes; a stranger, certainly, since he asked the way. Well, we will inquire about this individual when we have dined ourselves. This is the short bridle-path, Mr. Fulcombe."

The young man gave another sigh as their pleasant ride came to an end.

He had the delight of helping the fair girl from her horse, and then she turned to him, saying whisperingly, in an astonished tone, "Look! look! There is that very objectionable person's vehicle being led round to the stable-yard. He is a visitor, it seems, since he has driven up to the front entrance."

"Oh, there is some mistake!" murmured Sydney.

CHAPTER III.

DISENCHANTMENT.

EUPHEMIA LANE spoke a few words in haste to a servant, and leaving Mr. Fulcombe to be ushered in by him, hastened to her room to take off her habit. She was dressed in less than ten minutes, which time had sufficed to put the obnoxious young man before mentioned out of her head for the moment. At the instant she was only intent on not keeping her grandparents waiting longer for dinner.

What was her astonishment on entering the drawing-room to perceive a very vulgar-looking young man planted exactly in the middle of the hearthrug, his hands under his coat-tails, an air of swagger and ill-breeding about him which was quite unmistakable.

Her quick glance sought Mrs. Lane, and she instantly perceived that the latter was very much discomposed, and that her grandfather also appeared uncomfortable and ill at ease.

"Effie, my dear," said the dignified old gentleman, "let me introduce young Mr. Jaspar Bernard."

Jaspar Bernard! This man the son of her father's dearest friend? She could hardly respond by a cold bow.

"How de do?" said the new-comer, with assurance. "Knew you must be Miss Lane the moment I set eyes on you. Shake hands. You and I must be chums, as our governors were!"

Effie caught her breath. Could she have heard aright? Certain it is that she did *not*

put out her hand. But as dinner was announced at that same moment, there was a general move, and Effie's reluctance to shake hands was apparently unnoticed.

"Dinner ready?" cried Mr. Jaspar Bernard, with alacrity, jumping up and placing himself by Effie's side. "Come along, then; you and me will pair off. I always look out for the young ladies!"

The rest of the party remained aghast. It was but too evident that this young man had never been accustomed to the ordinary usages of society.

Old Mr. Lane came forward in his most dignified manner.

"I will take my granddaughter to dinner," said he.

"And I and Mr. Fulcombe will follow you Mr. Bernard," said the old lady, putting her arm on Sydney's.

"All right. Just for to-night I don't mind, but I ain't always to be served so, you know. Now, then, I'm as hungry as a hunter!"

"I am so much obliged to you for your kindness to my granddaughter," Mrs. Lane managed to say to Mr. Fulcombe as she went toward the dinning room.

No sooner had the little party reached it than Mr. Jaspar again made himself unpleasantly noticeable.

"Give us a little hot brandy and water, and be quick about it! I'm perished driving so far. My! this is a handsome place, though, this Glenwood! I can see that by lamplight."

Sydney glanced at the young lady of the house, and saw the utmost distress painted on her countenance.

Her eyes sought his for a moment, as if thus mutely to claim sympathy; and at this silent appeal Sydney felt his own heart thrill.

In the embarrassment which had fallen on the hosts, it devolved on him to do what lay in his power to lighten the trouble of the situation, and he talked on at random.

Effie, meanwhile, took courage to look at the person who had so astonished and repelled her.

She wished to see what he was like.

What her glance discovered was a young man of twenty, very high-colored, dressed with a certain amount of fashion, but in bad taste and with vulgarity. He was somewhat high-shouldered, and had a decidedly underbred air.

This individual was dispatching the delicacies on his plate with alarming rapidity. He was loud-voiced, too, and had a harsh, discordant laugh.

Was *this* the son of her father's dearest friend?

In withdrawing her quick glance, she encountered that of Sydney, and met in his eyes respectful sympathy.

He could understand the stab of disappointment she had received, after all she had been saying to him this evening as they waited by the forge.

"I say!" cried Jaspar, when he had gorged himself rather than eaten his dinner—"I say!" he repeated, stretching his legs under the table, and turning, with a wink, to Effie, "you'll be my Valentine, you know, to-morrow! I came here to-day a-purpose!"

Miss Lane colored to her temples with offended pride.

She could be haughty when people were presuming, and judged this speech as presumptuous.

Instead of replying to it, she addressed Mr. Fulcombe.

"Are you staying some time with Mrs. Fulcombe?"

"My aunt is kind enough to say I am to make Fulcombe Lodge my head-quarters while I am in the East," returned he; "but she, like all the rest of the world, will be going to New York almost directly, I suppose."

Mr. Jaspar Bernard again broke in.

"New York! What d'ye want to go to New York for, when you've got such a place as Glenwood? I sha'n't go; I shall stay here! Jolly place this! Glad to find myself in it! Now I'm here, I won't run away in a hurry!"

Mrs. Lane looked at her granddaughter in amazement.

"We shall be going to town for the grand opera, art receptions and other festivities."

"Grand opera! Haven't you got as fine a voice as any of those big bugs of singers they're making such a fuss about? And the reception I got here is all the reception I want."

The assembled party repressed a painful smile.

"Capital cook you've got, too, I must say! Haven't eaten such a roast fowl ever in my life! Done to a turn! Somehow, what with the good dinner, and the cold drive, and the good fire, I feel uncommon sleepy! Excuse me, ladies, if I drop off a minute!"

The vulgar young man, with a more vulgar manner than ever, stretched his legs to their utmost extent, and soon actually fell fast asleep before their eyes.

The ladies rose quickly, the two gentlemen followed, leaving Mr. Jaspar Bernard profoundly at his ease, and solus.

Mr. and Mrs. Lane mounted the stairs slowly, speaking together in low tones, so that, on reaching the drawing-room, Effie found herself alone with Sydney.

"Oh, Mr. Fulcombe—" began she.

But here her bitter disappointment was so keen that, in a moment, the tears *would* force their way, and she walked to the fire-place, vainly essaying to check them.

Sydney Fulcombe followed her, but did not venture to speak for a moment.

Then he said, very softly, "Believe me, I can sympathize with you! I understand how shocked and distressed you must be!"

She looked up at him through her tears. What a contrast between that ill-bred, coarse, assertive young man in the dining-room, and this quiet, handsome gentleman, wearing so calm an air of high-breeding! They were like beings of an entirely different sphere.

"Mr. Fulcombe," murmured Effie, "pray believe that my dear father's friend must be the exact opposite to that terrible person down stairs! My father was the most diffident the most refined and educated of gentlemen! His friend cannot have met his son for years; cannot be aware of the manner in which he has grown up!"

"No; It is impossible! But do not distress yourself so keenly, Miss Lane. The son is not the father. In a little while he will disappear altogether from your horizon; and I presume that even he is capable of being made to feel where he is not welcome."

"He is wholly insufferable!" exclaimed Effie, the tears still standing in her beautiful eyes.

How he remembered her words afterward!

Here Mr. and Mrs. Lane entered, and coffee was brought in.

"Burton," said Mr. Lane, to a grave, elderly man-servant, in plain clothes, "when Mr. Bernard wakes, you had better show him to his room, and say that we have retired. He can breakfast to-morrow at what hour he likes in the study."

"Yes, sir. I understand, sir," replied Burton, who, in his way, had been as much shocked as Effie herself at the under-bred tone of the visitor.

"Pray let me be of any use I can in relieving you of the task of entertaining Mr. Bernard, sir," said Sydney, to Mr. Lane. "Can I offer to ride with him to-morrow? My aunt will be glad to give him luncheon, I know. He will amuse her."

Effie looked at him gratefully; so did her grandfather.

"I could not think of imposing on you or Mrs. Fulcombe such an infliction," replied the latter.

But Sydney laughed at what he called the oddities of the young fellow; declared that he would undertake to pilot him about to-

morrow, and would ride over immediately after breakfast. After which he took his leave gracefully.

"What a thoroughly nice, gentlemanly fellow!" exclaimed Mrs. Lane, approvingly, when the door had closed on Mr. Fulcombe.

"Yes, indeed. The contrast between him and that young cub down-stairs is distressing!" said Mr. Lane. "I don't know what we are to do with him. He is thoroughly unpresentable. In spite of his being the son of our dear boy's greatest friend, we must get rid of him as soon as possible."

Effie slipped her hand into that of her grandfather and sat silent.

There rushed into her mind that never-forgotten scene at her father's death-bed, seven years ago, when he had enjoined her never to lose the chance of doing his best friend, Jaspar Bernard, a kindness, and never to refuse him one; and her own reply—"Papa—dearest papa, can you doubt me in this? I promise, most solemnly!"

Her tender recollections were painfully interrupted by the noisy opening of the door, and Mr. Jaspar swaggered in.

Coming straight to the side of Miss Lane, he sat down close by her, smiling confidently.

"Got rid of that swell—eh? I'm glad of it. Leaves *me* a clear field. Ha, ha! But never mind him. You and I will have a deal to say to each other. I've got father's likeness here to show you, and a letter from the old chap. You'll like to see them to-night, I'll be bound!"

"To-morrow, if you please; not to-night," replied Effie, faintly.

"All right! To-morrow, then. You're sleepy, too, I'll be bound!"

"Where is Mr. Bernard now?" asked Mr. Lane, seeking to relieve his granddaughter from the remarks of Mr. Jaspar.

"Where? Oh, the old fellow is off to Malta, he says! It's all a hum, you know, about the state of his health. He's sound enough. The fact o' the matter is, he *likes* being abroad, and so he stays there. But I'll write him such an account of Glenwood that we'll have him here to our—" (the graceful youth hesitated for an instant). "We'll have him here in no time; see if we don't!"

Effie rose.

"I will say good-night now, grandmamma. Are not you also tired?" said she.

"Yes, yes!" interposed Mr. Lane. "Better retire with Effie. Good-night, my dear! I will follow you very shortly."

"Oh, then I shall go to bed too!" ejaculated Mr. Jaspar, yawning.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECRET.

EFFIE was early awake next morning. The disturbance of mind she had experienced the evening before had been so keen, that it influenced her power of repose. Besides, it had been arranged between herself and her grandparents that they would breakfast earlier than usual, in the hope of escaping the society of their unwelcome guest at that meal.

Softly went the young lady's footfall upon the wide staircase, and very beautiful she looked on this February morning.

Her thoughts had flown away to her moonlight ride last evening, and to the companion of that ride, when she was unpleasantly interrupted by a loud call of, "Good-morning, Valentine!"

And there stood the burly, good-looking, vulgar, most objectionable young man, who had so much shocked all the customs of her world the evening before.

"Good-morning, Mr. Bernard," returned Miss Lane, with freezing politeness.

"Why shouldn't we call each other by our Christian names at once, eh?" continued this dense specimen of humanity, quite impervious to her coldness.

Effie took no notice of him whatever, but walked away with silent dignity. To her surprise, he followed her, and closed the door of the room she had entered. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Lane were there. She was alone with this insufferable person.

"This is my grandmother's private room, Mr. Bernard. At this early hour she prefers being alone," said Miss Lane, freezingly.

"Come, now, Valentine; that's not the way to treat a fellow on *this* day of all others! Why, even the birds remember Valentine's Day! And I *must* say a word to you alone; so what time so good as the present? When you have heard it, I'll be bound that you won't look so glum at me, my dear."

"Sir!" rejoined Effie, controlling her indignation at his insolence, except by the fire which gleamed in her eyes; "sir, you must understand, once for all, that even your near relationship to my father's old friend will not permit you to be presuming. Pray let me hear anything you have to say, as we shall not meet again for some time."

"Oh, that's the way the wind blows, is it? Well, then, just sit down, and listen to me, my lady. First and foremost, here's my governor's photo. You ought to know it, for I know there's a likeness of him hangs up in your dining-room. Next, here's some letters of his, and some letters of your governor's. You read 'em, and you listen to my little secret; and then let's see if you settle

to send me to the rightabout, or whether you accept me for your Valentine."

"Is that all you have to say?" said Effie, with icy composure.

She gathered up the letters he had placed on the table, just glanced at the photograph, and was about to withdraw.

"All? No, not by a long way. If it was, I reckon you'd still show me the cold shoulder. No; didn't I say just now that I had a secret to tell you? The secret will explain the letters."

He laughed very disagreeably, while Effie responded in her haughtiest tone, "I have no secrets from my grandfather and grandmother, and, of course, I shall make them acquainted with anything you may say to me. Now I am ready to hear what you wish to tell me, but may I ask you to be as brief as possible?"

"It's soon said, my dear, and you may tell whoever you like—grandfather and grandmother, and everybody at Glenwood, if you think best to do so; but I don't fancy you will! Oh, no! this secret, I take it, will be between us two forever."

Effie made no answer. She was immeasurably repelled.

Jaspar Bernard drew nearer to her, and whispered, "This is the secret, fair Valentine. Your governor, Mr. Angus Stuart Lane, that all the world thought so much of and respected so very highly, did a very queer thing once upon a time, and my governor, poor old fellow, saved him from the consequences—prevented the matter being found out. Hence his uncommon gratitude. In plain words, your father did something which the law of the land calls *bigamy*. Now, d'ye understand?"

Euphemia could only stare at him helplessly. She felt as if struck by a hard blow, and could not speak in reply to these dreadful words.

"And so," continued Jaspar Bernard, "My old father is to reap the benefit of his kindness in what you're a-going to do for his son. You told me to be quick, and put the matter in a nutshell, and so I have."

He paused a second time, and went on again:

"Stands to reason your governor, who was a swell, wouldn't have been so devoted to *mine* without a pretty good cause. He recommended him to you, his only daughter, on his death-bed, and all that! You'll remember that, though, better than me, as you was there, and I, a little chap, far enough away. My old dad is in the leather trade. He travels, that's what he does. He's not poor, but he's not rich, and he always hit on this plan of giving me a fortune. Now, d'ye see?"

"I suppose *you* understand," said Effie, her eyes dilating, "that you will have to prove your words; and if they are false, as they *must* be— Oh, how dare you come with such a tale to *me*?" she cried out.

"I'll wait. Natural you should be roused a bit; but you'll find all correct. Think it over, and then come and talk to me again. You'll fall in with my little plan then, see if you don't. By the by, we haven't said much about that yet; but of course you understand."

"Speak out, sir, and expect no connivance from me in any of your schemes," replied the girl, in a tone which betrayed her scorn.

Her distress gave her courage to bear up as yet.

"I speak out plain enough now, but surely you don't need to be told. Isn't this Valentine's Day? Haven't I told you I'm your Valentine? And, by Jove! I'm glad to be! I'd have married you for your fortune. I won't deny my governor always looked to making my fortune that way, poor old fellow! He was so sorry I wasn't a year or two older. He has been so eager for me to grow up, don't you see? Well, as I was sayin', I'd marry you any way; but now that I've seen you I shall fall in love, and no mistake. My dear Effie, I adore you already. You're the most beautiful young lady in America."

If Euphemia Lane could have withered him with a glance, I fear he would have been transfixed by hers in that moment. Intense and sickening disgust and dread overcame her, and she sunk, half-fainting, upon a chair, just as Burton came into the room, bearing a tray, and followed by a footman.

Then Effie rose tottering, grasped the fatal letters with her trembling hands, and escaped from Jaspar Bernard's presence.

Her maid, a young woman named Phoebe Worth (of whom we shall hear more in this story) was surprised and extremely alarmed at the aspect of her young lady as the latter re-entered the apartment she had so lately left. Then she was calm and cheerful, her own beautiful, happy self; now she was ghastly pale, trembling with restrained agitation, and looked as if some horror had suddenly come into her life.

"Oh, miss!" cried Phoebe, discontinuing her occupation abruptly—"oh, dear, miss, what is the matter?"

"Hush, Phoebe! I have been upset; but I don't wish to alarm dear grandmamma. Go and say that I will breakfast in my own room to-day—that my head aches badly."

"Yes, miss," returned the girl, gently. She adored her mistress. Why, shall be told presently.

With light footsteps Phoebe went off to give her message, and returned silently with some tea, which she placed beside Effie, who had thrown herself back on her sofa, and, with fixed gaze, was striving to think.

"Leave me quite alone for a whole hour, Phoebe, do you hear?" said Effie, with distress in her voice.

"Very well, miss," replied the maid, with answering trouble in her own.

And then Effie was left alone—alone with the letters. Shudderingly she separated them. Here were some from her father, written long years ago to Jaspar Bernard's father; and there were one or two others, written apparently to some one he was attached to. But where was the proof of the—of that dreadful thing of which her dead father was accused? The mere mention of it, she felt assured, would kill her grandparents. They idolized her father's memory. To destroy that object of worship would be to bring down their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Let her, if possible—if in some frightful way this terrible thing should be true—let her shield them from the knowledge, if it cost her her own life.

In arguing thus with herself, Effie never imagined that she could consent to marry the man who had come to destroy her peace. The thought was too monstrous. She only said to herself that she would buy his silence in some way, even if she gave him half her fortune.

But there lay the letters before her—not many. She tore open the first, and read:

"MY DEAR BERNARD:—

"When I think from what you have saved me—when I remember what I should be feeling now but for your timely silence, your true friendship—that I should have been a lost and wretched man, my gratitude to you is measureless, unspeakable. Oh, Bernard, I long to do something!—not to pay the debt; I feel that is beyond me; but to show you how I bless you for your mute interposition, in your silence, for your brotherly way of acting.

"I was mad. I did not stay to think of the consequences of my act. And what should I be now but for you? All my life long I shall remember this evidence of your good friendship. Neither I nor mine will ever forget it.

"Your ever sincerely grateful

"ANGUS STUART LANE."

There were three others of the same sort, all pointing to some deep obligation incurred by Effie's father, all hailing Bernard as his deliverer from some unexplained danger.

To Effie they were conclusive. The words were vague, but it was indeed undeniable that Mr. Angus Lane had been led into some situation which he shuddered to remember, and from which Mr. Bernard had rescued him.

And then the young girl's memory went back to the last illness of her father, seven years ago, during which he had more than

once enjoined her to do all the good in her power (if it ever came in her way) to his dear friend, Jaspar Bernard. Then rose up, too, the death-bed scene, and the sick man's reiterated injunctions to her, when but a girl not twelve years old, to bear in mind forever all he had said of Jaspar Bernard. Her own eager promise—her father's look of satisfaction—were they to be a torture to her forever?

She snatched up another letter, addressed to a "Miss Minworth," and beginning "Darling Annie." It was filled with affectionate expressions, and the writer signed himself, "Always yours, Angus Stuart Lane."

A knock at the door and Phoebe re-entered.

"If you please, miss," said the girl, with respectful sympathy, "your grandmamma sends her love and begs you will rest till your headache is better. She is breakfasting herself in her own room to-day; and would you like to drive with her at two o'clock, miss?"

Effie's throbbing brain barely took in the sense of the words addressed to her.

"Tell me again what was grandmamma's message," said she.

Phoebe repeated the words.

"Take my thanks to grandmamma, and I should like to go out if—unless my headache is obstinate. And, Phoebe, come back, I want you to take another message for me."

"Yes, miss," said Phoebe, with a glance of anxiety at her young lady.

She felt that there was some grave misfortune in the air, and could only connect it vaguely with the arrival of the ill-mannered visitor, whom all the servants were talking about in astonishment, and mimicking in derision.

Phoebe's gentle knock came again on Effie's door, and as the girl re-entered Effie started up, her face resolute, though she was pale and agitated.

"Phoebe," said she, "go and ask if Mr. Bernard has breakfasted; and then, if grandpa is not with him, say that I wish to see him for a moment in the breakfast-room—now—at once!"

"Yes, miss. I know that Mr. Lane is not with Mr. Bernard, miss; he is in the library."

"Very well. Then give my message immediately."

Phoebe went below and timidly knocked at the door of the room in which the unwelcome guest had been breakfasting.

She was somewhat abashed when she entered, in obedience to the words "Come in!" bawled out by young Bernard, to see another gentleman standing on the hearth-rug—Mr. Sydney Fulcombe, who had ridden

over, according to his promise, and had just proposed to the unmannerly man before him to ride back with him, and take luncheon at Fulcombe Lodge.

When Bernard saw the pretty Phœbe, he took a jocund tone.

"I haven't seen *you* before, my dear, but I'm very glad to see you now. I pray, who may you be?"

Phœbe, looking straight before her, replied stiffly:

"My mistress desires to see you, sir, in the breakfast-room at once."

"That's good news, my dear! Tell her I'm her most obedient servant. Hurrah! I shall have to throw you over, Mr. Fulcombe, if Effie Lane wants me to stay with her. She's my Valentine, you know!"

A disagreeable sensation took possession of Sydney. Why had Miss Lane honored this miserable creature before him by wishing to speak to him? But even as he thought this, he conjectured that it was probably done with a view to spare some annoyance to Mr. or Mrs. Lane. Yet he detested the idea of the delicate, high-bred young lady coming into any contact with a fellow like this.

Bernard swaggered out of the room, and while Fulcombe lounged about the apartment into which he had been shown, and tried in vain to read the morning papers, the beautiful owner of Glenwood went to to confront the person who had come her with such a blighting story.

Effie was unnaturally calm as she entered the breakfast-room.

"Don't speak!" she said, sternly, though in a low voice. "It is for me to question *you*. Give me particulars of—of this other marriage of which you told me."

"Ain't I come here to do so, my dear Effie? I'll begin, and never stop till I come to the end. Well listen, then, or I shall have to say it over again; not but that I could say things over and over a dozen times to *you*, just for the mere pleasure of looking at your beautiful face and figure."

"I forbid such remarks altogether. Be careful how you presume, sir," cried Effie.

"What! mustn't I tell you how I admire you? Well, I never!—that is hard lines! I shall have to pay you all the compliments after we are married, then, if I'm not allowed to speak before."

"Hush! this is too much! Keep to the business before you, and reply to my questions. On what grounds do you presume to accuse my father as you have done?"

"Well, this is how it was. You see, your governor wasn't a tricky old fellow by nature. I will do him that justice. When he started in life, he meant to do all fair and above-board; but he was carried on through

being so fond of the lady who everybody called Mrs. Angus Lane."

Effie listened in a rigid attitude, as if turned to stone.

"All would have been well if your governor had been a harder man; but he was soft-hearted, and so this is what happened. When a young fellow of three-and-twenty, he meets this Miss Minworth—(I'll show you the certificate, or rayther the copy of it, taken from the original, of course). Miss Annie Minworth is very beautiful, and very artful; she wants to marry somebody of good family, so she pretends to be over head and ears in love with your father. It seems she thought that though he wasn't rich then, that he would be rich in a few years—for he was nearly connected with wealthy relatives, you see.

"Well, your dad felt interested; he had danced with her once or twice at a reception or a garden-party, and been civil and kind—nothing more. And then what does she do but tells him her heart is broken. To mend it, he sacrifices himself, and marries her—secretly, of course, for *her* people were a good bit below his, though her relations had money enough. Now, when my lady found that she would have to live with narrow means all her life, with no chance of wealth, and no chance of her husband's relations taking her up, she was wild to dissolve the marriage, as she called it. But, bless you, *that ain't* so easy when you're once tied up!

"And so, to drive him to wish it as much as she did, she declared the truth—that she never cared for him, and never should! A pretty thing to find out when you've spoilt your own life for the sake of such a woman! However, it was too late. There was no untying the knot, and Miss Annie went off, without asking anybody's leave, to a rich uncle of hers in Chicago, who said he would adopt her if she would come and live with him.

"He was as good as his word, and your father's first—indeed his only wife—never returned to the East. There she lived, and there she died, only five years ago."

The unhappy Effie had grown whiter and whiter.

"Don't take on so, sweet Valentine," said Jaspar, attempting to possess himself of her hand. "Glenwood's your own; nobody can force that from you. But you have the old folks to consider. I reckon it would send them into their graves fast enough to know what you and I know!"

A fearful pang shot through the torn heart of the speechless girl, and young Bernard continued: "It so happened that your grandfather was in a very low, queer state of health just about this time, and thus it fell out that

your father never confessed what had happened—not even on his death-bed. He made up his mind never to marry, and to hold his tongue forever. If he had done that, I shouldn't be here, and you would never have heard this story.

"But now for the climax. Five years after his marriage, when Mrs. Lane had sworn by all that was good she would never call herself by her husband's name nor ever see him again, your father meets Miss Euphemia Arlington, your mother, Miss Effie, and there was no deception about her.

"She and your dad fell desperately in love with each other; their affection was plain and patent to everybody. Still, months rolled on. Mr. Angus Lane came and went, but never spoke out. The young lady at last, when he left her for good, grew seriously ill. They thought she would die, and so did she, for she sent for him to bid him farewell.

"And then he fell on his knees, and asked her to marry him; told her how he had loved her devotedly all through, but his means didn't justify his marrying.

"Then Miss Arlington got well in a trice, and the happy pair were married (as the young lady and everybody else believed), and lived happy as larks during the rest of their lives together, which wasn't long, you know, for your mother died soon after your birth, and your father ten years later.

"And the years rolled on, and nobody ever so much as suspected that the worthy and much respected Mr. Angus Stuart Lane had committed bigamy. Nobody ever shall suspect it, unless you drive me to desperation, Miss Effie."

He paused an instant, but she did not say one word.

"'Tis time to tell you now," he continued, "what my governor had to do with the matter, and why your governor swore eternal friendship with him. I explained that my old dad was in the leather trade, didn't I? Well, in the course of business he ran up against Mr. Angus Stuart Lane, and was quite aware of the position he held and what family he belonged to.

"Now, your mamma was very fond of riding, and very particular about her side-saddle. Your father tried no less than three for her before she got one to her liking. That was how it fell out that Mr. Angus went to my old man for the very best saddle that could be made.

"Do be very particular," says your governor to mine. 'I don't mind what price I pay,' says he, 'for it is for my wife. We have just returned from our honeymoon trip,' says he.

"Oh, indeed, sir!" answers my father,

who was an educated old chap even then, and he's always learning something new in his travels. 'Oh, indeed,' says he, 'then I can understand you want something super-excellent in the way of a side-saddle, for I'm a newly-married man myself, and my wife is the first person in the world to be considered.

"That fatal side-saddle did the business. Soon after this—within a year, that is—my father goes to Chicago, and who does he run up against but the uncle of the real Mrs. Angus Lane. So it fell out that he met her herself, but she called herself Miss Minworth, not Mrs. Lane.

"Fine young woman she was, too. My father declared that he should have been head over ears in no time if his heart hadn't been somewhere else.

"Well, he saw her pretty often; and one day she says, in confidence, 'I'm from New York, you know, Mr. Bernard.'

"'Indeed!' says father. 'Wherever you're from, miss, you're an ornament to your birth-place, and an ornament to Chicago, too.'

"She laughs, and then she answers, 'I'm not miss, to tell the truth, Mr. Bernard. I married in haste, and repent at leisure.'

"So then my father says to her that sure no man could be such a brute as to ill-use such an attractive young lady as she was; and she made answer that she didn't complain of that, but that her husband and she didn't suit each other, and so they separated by consent; and in Chicago she would live and die.

"Of course my governor asked who was the happy, or rather the unhappy man, and she says, 'It's Mr. Angus Stuart Lane, of Harlem (which was where he lived then, in a much plainer style than ever you can remember of).'

"'You don't know him, surely!' says Mrs. Lane, as my father gave a great start.

"'I do know him; a nice quiet gentleman, to all appearance,' he answers.

"'Appearances are often deceitful; but he's quiet enough, if that's all,' said the lady. 'But what made you start like that?' she added. 'He's never married again?'

"'Not he,' he answered; and though he saw her times and times afterward, he never gave a hint about the other wife.

"When my governor got back to New York, he took the opportunity of calling on your father, Miss Effie, and the two gentlemen had a long talk together.

"'I've seen a lady of your acquaintance in Chicago—Miss Minworth that was. She's not pining for you any more than you are for her. She wanted to know, though, if you had married again,' says father.

"There was such a scene! Your father nearly fainted, Miss Effie,

" 'Keep up,' says my father. 'Of course I said nothing of the new wife. I shall never breathe it to a soul.'"

"And he kept his word, save and except that on my twentieth birthday the dear old fellow told me all about it."

" 'But, Jaspar,' says he, 'you keep it tight as the grave, and his daughter will marry you after a bit,' meaning you, my dear, the heiress of Glenwood."

"I hugged the old man. Then we had a long talk, and he told me how to manage, and how he'd written to you every year on Valentine's Day, and that I was to get to Glenwood on the eve of St. Valentine. So here I am; and ready to fall at your feet, Miss Effie, and to be your most devoted slave forever."

She recoiled from him, with a shudder.

After an effort, she spoke, in a hollow voice.

"Am I to understand," she said, "that your terms for silence are that you expect me to marry you?"

He winced ever so little, and for the first time, a flush of anger crossed his brow.

"You don't put it in a very polite fashion. But if I must speak out, yes, then; those *are* the terms I ask for keeping silence—that you shall marry me within a year or so. The sooner the better."

She shuddered, then again addressed him:

"I think we can come to some other arrangement, better suited to both parties. In marrying me you aim at my property—the half, I presume. Well, sir, you shall have it as soon as my grandparents are dead. Till then, I must make you an allowance. Can you expect more?"

"You're a generous girl, and no mistake!" he cried out. "The offer is handsome enough as far as money is concerned; but, Effie dear, I want to share Glenwood with you. I have been falling more and more in love with you every moment. I shall never see a girl I like so well; and, besides, I mean to assume your name, and write on my cards—'Mr. Bernard Lane.' Glenwood would be nothing without you. It's as well to speak out at once. I shall whisper my little secret into the ears of grandmamma if you don't consent to marry me. Not right off. I'm not an ogre; but by and by, when I've had time to court you a bit. But we can fix our wedding-day now—next St. Valentine's, unless you relent and name a nearer one. Now you go and have a nice drive out or a ride, and think over all we've said; and I know everything will be settled as comfortably as possible. Once married, or even engaged, you're as safe as if I'd never heard this precious secret; for you won't catch me peach-

ing on my own wife, nor yet my old governor on his daughter-in-law. I've promised Mr. Fulcombe to go over to Fulcombe Lodge to lunch with him; so good-by for the present, my dear Effie."

CHAPTER V.

PHOEBE.

THE course of this narrative enjoins us now to explain why it was that Phoebe Worth, Effie's maid, should be so devoted to her young lady.

Rather more than three years before, Euphemia Lane (then only fifteen) had strayed into a somewhat lonely part of the country stretching round Glenwood. The girl had gone on, a little and a little farther, tempted by the bright sunshine after days of drenching rain.

Effie was allowed to wander about the grounds of her own possessions, and this lane looked so tempting, why should she not pursue it?

It was a picturesque place; tangled briers, ferns, and oak-boughs overhanging the path.

But at the end of the lane she came upon a dwelling, neither picturesque nor inviting—a low-roofed, isolated cottage, with broken windows, the garden gate off its hinges, and a certain air of misery apparent even on the outside, which seemed to make it the abode of desolation, mourning, and woe.

More than two years had passed since Effie had visited this spot; but she well remembered that it had not then worn its present aspect, from which she now shrunk.

At this moment a dark cloud shrouded the sun, and a gathering storm burst suddenly. And as she hesitated, down poured the rain more and more heavily. Then Effie made a dash for the wretched habitation close by.

"May I take shelter for a few moments?" asked she, timidly, gazing almost with fear into the miserable den which was disclosed when the door opened.

A scowling, heavy-browed, hard-featured woman, who had opened the door at her summons, barely stayed to answer her.

"Ye can stan' up ag'in' the wall," she said recklessly.

Then, shaking her fist at a girl and a crowd of children huddled together in rags in a corner of the black kitchen, she disappeared into a room beyond, from whence moans of pain issued from time to time.

When the shrinking Effie took courage to look round her, her gaze encountered a sad sight.

The room was very bare, the grate was empty, the walls nearly black, the two or three chairs were broken, while half a dozen

children, shivering and in rags, cowered with a most forlorn-looking girl of about seventeen against one side of the wall in a corner.

These children were so wretched in appearance, that their hunger and want appeared in their faces, and the younger ones were wailing.

Effie regarded them with infinite compassion.

The youngest of all, a boy hardly three years old, began to sob piteously.

"I so hungry! I so hungry!" he repeated.

The gaunt woman—who afterward turned out to be the children's aunt—came again hurriedly from the room adjoining.

"I'll give ye the stick, the whole lot of ye, if you're not quiet!" she said, in a threatening tone, with a fierce gesture. "Be still, then, and let your poor mother die in peace—and die she must of want, if o' nothin' else!"

Effie shuddered. These people were too utterly wretched to think of her or care for her presence.

It was a cold day, very cold, and her own dress of silk and fur was costly and warm, while those starving children huddled in the corner were in thin rags and tatters.

The rain beat wildly against the window, which was broken in several places.

Effie's heart was stirred as it had rarely been moved before.

The fierce woman had left the room again. Effie was alone with the children.

She crept softly forward, and whispered to the biggest girl among the group:

"Haven't you any father to take care of you?"

But at that question the girl, instead of answering, burst into tears, and, frightened at the noise of her own sobs, rushed out into the rain.

Effie followed her to a wretched shed at the end of the garden.

"Do tell me why you are so sad and hungry?" urged Effie.

"Father's a thief," sobbed the girl, "and he's gone off saying he'll never come back, and nobody won't give him no work, and poor mother's starving, and the baby only four days old. We've hardly had any food this week past, and we haven't anything but a sack to sleep on now!"

"No beds?" said Effie.

The girl shook her head, beginning to sob anew.

But Effie's whole soul was roused. She must save them.

"Don't cry so," she implored, "but help me to do something! Or, wait; go and tell your brothers and sisters not to cry, and that they shall soon have some dinner. See! here

is money, and I will soon come back! Run and stop the children from crying!"

The sight of six or seven silver pieces and a five dollar gold piece Effie took from her purse, filled the so-lately despairing cottage-girl with such joy, that she stood stupefied.

But now a harsh voice called: "Phoebe, Phoebe!" and the woman appeared outside the cottage door, gesticulating angrily.

But Effie was too much taken out of herself to fear her anger, and ran toward her.

"Oh," she said, eagerly, with tears in her gray eyes, "I will soon send you help! Why are they so miserable? Where is the furniture?"

"Help!" exclaimed the woman bitterly; "what help can a girl like you give 'em, poor creatures? Their father has ruined 'em through drink; and their mother, and they, too, are left to die o' starvation! And now their father's gone off on one of his thieving bouts; and, if he's caught, he'll go to prison; and if he isn't, and he comes back and finds the misery worse than ever—nothin' to eat, nor a bed to lie on, and his wife so ill—he'll go off and drink worse than ever; but, maybe, he'll never come back!"

"I'll send you help directly. I live at Glenwood," said Effie, seeking to give comfort.

But her words had an opposite effect.

"Glenwood! Why, that's the very place he's always a-speaking about."

"Never mind that. Who can you get to come and help clean up the house a bit? But the first thing is to get fire and a dinner for the children. And what does the poor mother want?"

The woman threw up her arms in wonder.

"You're never the young lady from Glenwood?" she said.

"Yes, yes," said Effie. "Don't let us lose a moment."

That was a very busy day for Effie.

When she rushed breathless into the housekeeper's room—her grandfather and grandmother were absent spending the day with a friend—demanding of the housekeeper herself cold meat, cake, pie, soup, wine, and blankets, that stately matron thought her young lady had gone demented.

But when the worthy woman understood for what family all these things were wanted, she exclaimed, in dismay: "They're a beggarly lot—all of 'em, Miss Effie. And as for their father, he's been in prison more than once or twice."

"But the children are starving! There is no food in the house, no bed for them to sleep on!" replied Effie.

In vain the housekeeper insisted that that was their father's fault.

Urged by her young mistress, a meat-pie,

warm soup, wine, fuel, mattresses, and many other things, were sent off in a cart to the drunkard's cottage, and it was not till evening drew on that the young heiress of Glenwood desisted from her charitable labors.

She was full of her day's adventure, when, tired and happy, and attended by one of the maids, she reached her beautiful home.

"If you please, miss, the gardener begs to speak a word to you! He's in the smoking-room, miss," said a footman, meeting her in the hall.

Effie turned her steps thither.

There, in the glow of the firelight, stood the head-gardener of the estate, and behind him two—no, three men.

Two were under-gardeners, the other man—wild, haggard, defiant, dreadful to look upon—seemed to be in their custody.

The gardener came hastily forward to meet her in the doorway.

"We've got the man at last, miss—Jim Worth, the sneak-thief. He was taken here in the grounds. He's stolen more fowl on the place than any other man for miles round; but we'll have him safe and sound in jail now, where he won't have the opportunity of stealing your chickens and turkeys, miss."

The man, held in ward, answered with a rough oath.

Effie's pitying eyes turned toward him.

"Who is he?" she cried. "What did you say was his name?"

"Jim Worth's his name. You must have heard of *him*, miss."

"Let me get free o' this and ye shall *all* hear o' me!" shouted the man, desperately.

"We're going to lodge him in the lock-up to-night, miss; and he's safe to be convicted when he's tried!" said one of the other men.

"He won't escape this time."

"Oh, yes yes! He must! He shall!" cried Effie, in much distress. "Have I anything to do with it? Surely I have; for the place is mine, and I wish him to go free."

Her unexpected words startled those around her. The criminal himself was electrified. He raised his head, and a more human expression came into his face. But the gardener was indignant.

"You'd never let such a fellow go, surely, miss? He leaves his family to go on drinking sprees. Nobody will give him work. Not a soul will have anything to say to him."

"But, perhaps, he would work now," persisted Effie, who could hardly speak for the fast-coming tears.

"Who'd give him work, such as he, miss?" cried the gardener.

"I would!" answered Effie, gently.

A new light had come into the defiant man's eyes. He uttered a sort of cry.

"Give me another chance, and I'll start afresh! I never meant to go back to the misery at home—the house with no food in it, nor no fire; but I will to-night. I'll try again, if I have the chance. Bless you, miss!"

The gardener was now sulkily silent.

Miss Lane chose to be obstinate; let her take the consequences.

"He had a chicken under his coat when he was taken," said one of the under men.

"I do not mean to prosecute," said Effie. "Let him go home now."

Those present remonstrated with her in vain.

Effie had quite made up her mind, and the man, so lately hard as a rock, uttered another "Bless you, miss!" as he passed out.

Out into the gloomy evening light, with no light to look forward to at home, no food, no fire, a wailing wife, an empty house. Yet he went on—on. Shrinking from what was to come next, from all the hopelessness he should meet, so greatly of his own creating, yet he went on!

Suddenly, as he turned a corner, a light gleamed through the gloom. A fire in *his* house! Who had lighted it? There were no coals when he deserted that house four days ago.

And then he reached the door. Opening it, he stood transfixed upon the threshold. The children were there, but smiles instead of tears were on their faces; their hair was smooth and tidy; an air of hope and brightness pervaded everything. There was a cheerful fire in the grate, a supper spread out on a table, covered with a clean cloth, and his eldest girl, Phoebe, falling on his neck began to sob with joy.

"She's better, dear mother is," whispered she. "That beautiful young lady sent her such good soup and wine. And we have got blankets and a bedstead. Oh, father, we are not hungry to-night. I think that good young lady is an angel, indeed!"

The father thought so, too. That night he made a vow never to steal another bit, and to work instead of drinking.

"She said she'd give me work—*me*, who have always been robbing her! But now, if she only keeps her word, and gives me something to do, I'm a made man!"

There was infinite joy in the Worth cottage that night. The sick wife raised her head and smiled, and heard with supreme happiness the first kind words her husband had spoken to her this many a day. And the young

lady *was* as good as her word. James Worth had a situation found for him at Glenwood. He was taken on in the gardens. His wife soon grew strong again on the nourishing things sent her from the great house. The children went to school, and Phoebe went to service. Three years after, when Miss Lane wanted a maid in a hurry to replace one who left to attend on a sick mother, Phoebe, having just then left her situation, was taken on temporarily, and had now been engaged permanently as Miss Lane's maid. We shall be at no loss now to understand why Phoebe was entirely devoted to the heiress of Glenwood.

CHAPTER VI.

IT IS TRUE.

Two or three weeks have rolled away since that fatal Valentine's morning when Jaspar Bernard explained to Euphemia Lane the real secret of her yearly valentine.

Since then, strange, unheard-of rumors had begun to circulate in the immediate neighborhood; since then, old Mr. and Mrs. Lane had suffered tortures of anxiety, for their Effie, the joy of their lives, was strangely unlike herself. She had been suffering from illness, it is true, and had kept her room for nearly a week; but that would not change their bright, happy, healthy darling into the sad, moping, heavy-eyed girl, who dragged herself about the house, and appeared striving to bear up against some hidden sorrow. What could be the explanation? Was it some love-affair? Whatever it was seemed to date from Jaspar Bernard's arrival. He was still at Glenwood. Effie had asked him to stay, in their presence. But it was wholly impossible that he could have inspired her with affection.

To all the tender entreaties of her grandparents the girl had been gently impenetrable.

"Did I ever do a thing in my whole life that I wished to hide from you?" she said.

"But what is it that so troubles you, my darling?" entreated the old grandmother.

"I ought not to be troubled. I have had everything all my life too easy for me; and shall I complain now if I have to do what I don't quite like?"

"What is it that you don't like doing, my Effie? Let your grandfather and grandmother help you to decide."

"There are some things we must decide for ourselves. Questions of duty, for instance," replied the girl.

"Yes, my dear; but it is not always easy to see our duty."

"It ought to be," replied Effie. "Surely, my own conscience ought to be able to tell

us what is right or wrong, unless, we have slighted it continually."

Her grandmother could say nothing against this reasoning, but she was intensely anxious to discover what Effie alluded to.

"At least, confide in me, my darling," urged the old lady.

"Of course, I shall tell you and grandpapa; but it is as well to think over difficult matters alone, and so I will, grannie dear. Let grandpapa's birthday come and go, then I will explain. He is seventy-three, isn't he, the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, darling."

And so matters stood three weeks after Valentine's Day.

Meantime, Sydney Fulcombe stayed on at Fulcombe Lodge. He had dined twice at Glenwood. Effie, with Mr. and Mrs. Lane, had lunched and dined at the Lodge. Mr. Fulcombe had ridden out with Mr. Lane on two occasions, Effie accompanying them. The young man had been with her once at church, having walked over to Glenwood on purpose to do so one Sunday morning; so that, altogether, these young people had met several times.

On Sydney Fulcombe's part, had he been the owner of Glenwood and if Effie had possessed only his slender income, not another hour would have flown over his head without laying his all at her feet. But as it was, he said to himself, "I will enjoy these golden days, in which I may speak to her, and see her smile. They will not last long. In the future I shall have only these to remember."

And then he asked himself why she had become sad; for though she bore up bravely in society (weeping the nights away in secret), it was impossible for any one to see her and not notice that she was changed.

At first he imagined that her delicate nature was irritated by the presence of Jaspar Bernard, whom her high sense of duty to her dead father forced her to retain awhile as a guest at Glenwood.

Then he believed that her late indisposition had left her weak, and unable to bear serenely the annoyance of her unwelcome guest. Next he was struck with the conviction that there was something unexplained.

Every day his aunt, Mrs. Fulcombe, talked to him about Glenwood, what a fine property it was, and what a duty it would be in him, a poor officer, to possess himself of such a property by offering his hand to Miss Lane!

"And do you think I should dare to do so aunt?" cried the young man.

"Why not? Am I not urging you to do so? Your family is equal in position to hers. You are young, and, let me tell you, a very handsome fellow, Sydney."

"I should hardly have the presumption to offer my hand to Miss Lane on account of my good looks, as you kindly call them, aunt."

"What folly! Of course, you would not say so in words. But I am sure she likes you very much. I saw her blush when she met you unexpectedly the other day."

"Aunt, that is impossible! Pray do not talk so!"

"It is not impossible that she blushed, Sydney! That was a fact!"

These few sentences from Mrs. Fulcombe did not make the young soldier dream less often about Euphemia Lane. In truth, the lovely girl was never out of his thoughts. He dreaded to face the truth that he must soon leave the Lodge. He wondered Effie herself had not already left for town. The charity ball came off in due season, but she let it pass without going to New York as she had lately intended.

When our hearts are full of any one thing which dominates all others, a touch makes the smoldering fire burst into flame.

So it was with Sydney Fulcombe, only that it was no mere touch which forced the expression of his love for Effie to rush to his lips in words, but a fearfully rude shock, which moved him to the inmost depths of his being.

He had been out shooting with his uncle, Mr. Fulcombe and a party of guests, who had returned to the Lodge for luncheon. Here, in the middle of the repast, when no one looked for it, the blow came.

In the midst of luncheon other visitors were announced—a Mrs. and Miss Darcy, residents in the neighborhood. No sooner had Mrs. Fulcombe welcomed her friends, than Mrs. Darcy spoke the words which took the sunshine out of Sydney Fulcombe's life, and made his brain reel.

"Oh!" she began, addressing her hostess, "Helen and I thought we must come and see if you could tell us anything about this dreadful marriage that is to come off. At first we refused to believe it; but it is too true."

"What dreadful marriage?" laughed Mr. Fulcombe. "How excited you seem about it, Mrs. Darcy!"

"I am excited. Can you hear it unmoved? Effie Lane is going to marry that horrible man who is staying at Glenwood—Jaspar Bernard!"

A dead silence pervaded the room for a moment. All present were thunderstruck.

Then all together cried out: "It is impossible!"

"I wish it were. But we have seen the minister's wife this morning, and she had the confirmation of the report from old Mrs. Lane herself. The dear grandmother is in such distress! She says all she can get from Effie is a steady reiteration that it is a duty to her dead father."

"Oh, but that is monstrous!" cried the assembled guests. In varying chorus they each commented on this unnatural engagement, all excepting one among them, who silently rose from the table, and, deadly pale, went out from the careless party.

We will follow him presently; just now we will see how the unhappy Effie had managed to come to such a painful resolution. Had she, in truth, the courage to marry this Jaspar Bernard, to link her fate for all her life to such an inferior and vulgar being, in order to save her idolized grandparents the torture of discovering the bitter truth, in order to protect her dead father's memory?

Well, she meant to marry him; she intended to pay the price of going through the ceremony. (Had he not said that, once his wife, *he* would be as anxious to conceal the story of her father's dishonor as herself?)

But she had arranged all beforehand. She would put off the hated wedding as long as possible; would stand with him at the altar in the hardihood born of desperation; and then would fly, and never should the husband who had threatened her with disclosing such a secret—who had overturned her innocent life—never should he see her face again.

But how could she fly? Ah! she knew who would be faithful to her. Phoebe would be true; so would Phoebe's father: together they would carry out her plan. And the plan was, that the newly-made bride should be concealed in Worth's cottage for some days at least; that Phoebe should remain at Glenwood, and appear as much at fault as any one else as to the whereabouts of her mistress; that she should (to all appearance) go to a new situation, being thus thrown out of the one she had; and that then she should secretly and by night join her young mistress, who, provided with plenty of funds, and having installed her grandfather and grandmother in a house of their own, should leave the fair dominion of Glenwood to the spoiler, and seek peace in flight to a distant land. When it was all over, she could communicate through Phoebe, with her beloved grandparents, and they could meet in some secure, remote place, the summer following. Jaspar Bernard would not dream of finding

his lost bride in some far-off Territory, or perhaps, better still, on one of the West Indies. It was a question if he even knew of the existence of such places! As ignorant as rapacious, and careless of her feelings, gone indeed was the supposition that she should find in the son a reflection of the father, whom she had judged by the hypocritical letters which had reached her once a year. And that father himself! Instead of the high-souled man she had pictured, he was a greedy adventurer, planning to work on the fears and tenderest affections of an innocent girl, and overwhelming her at the threshold of her bright future with a darkness which could never be removed from her life. How must he not have worked and traded on her own unhappy father's fears!

But not even to Phoebe did Effie detail her plan of partial escape. She only said to her, one evening, bursting into sudden tears, "Phoebe, I want you to help me!"

And then Phoebe was down on her knees in an instant beside her young mistress.

"If it's anything that me or mine can do, my dear young lady, we'll do it, and never say a word!"

Effie seized her maid's hand, and pressed it in token of thanks and trustful confidence.

"Phoebe, I must rely on you," she said. "I can't tell you yet something that I shall want you to do; but you will come with me, won't you, at a moment's notice?"

"To the ends of the earth, my dear, dear young lady! You may wake me from my sleep, and I'll be ready!"

This short exchange of sentences between the heiress and her maid took place the evening of that fatal day when Effie had promised to be Jaspar Bernard's wife; for on no other terms would he consent to hold his tongue—on no other. No offer of dividing with him Glenwood would silence him.

"You marry me, and I'm dumb forever; refuse, and the whole world shall know what I know!"

This was his continual reply to the prayers of the despairing girl. And so she gave her promise; and as she did so, thought, with a wild despair, of some tones, and looks, and sighs which had escaped Sydney Fulcombe in her presence. How noble he was! And if this dark cloud had not overshadowed her life, might it not have happened that a happy love, approved by all her friends and relatives, would in due time have increased the brightness of her lot? But she must turn her thoughts and hopes from Sydney now.

A gloomy evening was settling slowly into rain and darkness when Jaspar had succeeded in wringing from Euphemia Lane the promise

to marry him on the succeeding Valentine's Day, or even before.

She had been rigid and freezing during the short interview, not permitting him so much as to touch her hand. Indeed, she seldom saw him, except at the late dinner, and never addressed him.

"How shall I tell my dear grandmother—my poor grandpapa?" thought Effie, standing still where Jaspar had left her.

The door of the library was open, and she heard in the corridor without the gentle step of Mrs. Lane.

Next she was horrified at hearing the vulgar, exulting tones of Jaspar himself.

"It's all right, old lady!" he cried out, meeting the refined and delicate grandmother—"it's all right! This time next year we shall be bride and bridegroom. Effie has just consented to marry me next Valentine's Day."

The dignified Mrs. Lane stared at him in stupor. She had not been slow to note the extreme repugnance her granddaughter felt for this man; and now he came to her with such words as these! The thought that he had been taking too much wine shot into the old lady's mind, and she turned away hastily.

"Wish me joy, grandma!" cried Jaspar, following her. "I may call you grandmamma now, since Effie is going to marry me."

"Sir," cried Mrs. Lane, in her most frigid manner, "you are exhibiting worse taste than usual by choosing to make a jest of an elderly lady, who is also your hostess."

"Jest, indeed!" exclaimed the offensive young man. "I'm not jesting, I can tell you. Here, Effie, Effie! come and tell grandmamma that we're quite in earnest about being married!"

A moment's pause, then Effie herself came out of the library. She might have been a wraith, so pale and fixed was her young face.

Then Mrs. Lane found voice, and cried out, piteously, "My own dear child, forgive me for putting such a question to you; but you hear what this person says. It cannot be true!"

"Yes, grandmamma," said Effie, in a choked voice.

"What do you mean, my child?" asked the old lady, in affright.

"It is true, grandmamma."

"I told you so!" cried Jaspar, triumphantly. "Next Valentine's Day, if not sooner, we two are going to be married."

Poor old Mrs. Lane sunk back into one of the chairs placed against one side of the hall, and put out her hands appealingly.

"Stuart!" she cried feebly—"Stuart!"

Mr. Lane had just left his study, and was

crossing the hall, when he came upon this scene.

"Is anything the matter, Effie, dear?" asked he, looking wonderingly from one to the other of the group.

"Grandmamma is very much troubled at the view I take of my last promise to dear papa," said Effie, slowly and sadly.

"What view? What do you mean, my dear?" said the old gentleman, with a touch of anxiety in his voice.

Jaspar Bernard stood by, with a smile.

"Tell him yourself how it is, Effie," said he.

"My granddaughter must not be addressed in that familiar tone by you, Mr. Bernard," said Mr. Lane, warmly.

"Oh! you won't think so long," laughed Jaspar.

Mrs. Lane could restrain her grief no longer; she began to weep.

"Grandpapa," said Effie, mournfully, "I am sorry to distress you and grandmamma, and very sorry too for the duty I have to perform. It will change all my life. But when we have given a sacred promise to the dead, it must be performed, even at any cost to ourselves. I do not pretend to have any affection for M. Jaspar Bernard, but I am going to marry him."

"Never!" cried poor old Mr. Lane. "Never!" His accent alone was a protest and an entreaty against anything so monstrous.

"Yes, grandpapa!" said Effie, in the same sad and resolute tone in which she had spoken before.

"No need to make a face at that, old gentleman! We shall be as merry as birds, Effie and me, once we're married. Why you surely don't think I'm going to be another Bluebeard, nor yet to make ducks and drakes of her money? Not I! I'm going in for a happy home; and as for the money, don't I know the value of it better than to let it melt away? Rather! Besides which, I am not greedy. Half will be settled on Effie, half on me. So cheer up, old gentleman! cheer up! We'll have no end of a grand wedding at Glenwood next St. Valentine's, and you and the old lady shall dance a Highland jig."

CHAPTER VII.

THE APPEAL.

ALL this had happened four days before that one when Effie's engagement was announced at Fulcombe Lodge by Mrs. Darcy, and Sydney Fulcombe had got up and left the luncheon table silently. The frightful words kept throbbing in his brain. "Effie Lane is going to marry that horrible man who is staying at Glenwood, Jaspar Bernard!"

"There must be some mistake. I must see her. I cannot live another hour without asking her herself if this is true!"

He said this aloud to the winds as he tore along the path which led to Glenwood. He was too excited to pause—was impelled to rapid action by the working of his own mind.

The four miles between Fulcombe Lodge and Effie's home were soon passed over, and he did not halt or stop till he found himself (all his pulses beating painfully) at the entrance of the house.

What was he to do? Why was he there? Ah! that he did not ask himself distinctly; he only felt that he must see Effie herself or die.

"Is Miss Lane at home?" (How strange his own voice sounded!)

"Yes, sir," replied Burton. The latter ushered him into the drawing-room, which was empty.

Even the beautiful room, with its bright flowers, the tasteful ornaments and well-chosen furniture, looked changed to Sydney. The whole world was changed to him till this horrible rumor was negatived.

Intense anxiety took possession of him lest she should not come to him. But she came—the door opened slowly and she came! But was this the lovely girl he had ridden with to Glenwood that moonlight night not yet so many weeks since? Then she was bright with health and joy, and the thousand nameless charms which cluster round happy youthfulness. And this girl who entered, offering him her hand in such a quiet fashion, was she not fair and lovely?

Ah, yes! So lovely, so winning in her grief, so refined and apart from such a being as Jaspar Bernard, that it seemed sacrilege to connect her name with his in any way.

"How do you do, Mr. Fulcombe?"

She was unprepared for the passion with which he seized her hand, with which he addressed her.

"Miss Lane, I cannot live a moment longer without hearing from your own lips the—the truth or falsehood of a frightful rumor concerning you! But how shall I dare even to frame the question?"

"I know what you are going to say," said the girl, in a hopeless tone, withdrawing her hand slowly from his clasp. "Yes; it is too true. I made a sacred promise, and must keep it!"

"A promise! What promise?" stammered he.

"Did I not tell you?—the promise to my dear father. And I shall keep it," added she.

"Do you mean," he cried, impetuously, again seizing her hand in his impassioned

clasp—"do you mean that you will sacrifice your whole life's happiness?—for it must be sacrificed if you link your fate to the vulgar-minded man who has invaded your home."

"We must be resigned to lose happiness sometimes," said Effie, despairingly, allowing her hand to rest passively in his.

"But you misinterpret your father's injunction to you. In wishing you to do kindnesses to his friend and his friend's family, he did not enjoin you to sacrifice your life's happiness. Never could he have laid such a burden on you, nor ought you to be allowed to take such a load upon yourself."

"We must talk of it no more," said she, shivering, and seeking to withdraw her fingers from his clasp.

But he held them still more tightly.

"Effie," he whispered, drawing her toward him, "I will tell you to-day what I never hoped to breathe in your ear. I judged myself too far removed by want of fortune from your bright sphere. But I suffer such torture of heart that you will surely forgive my presumption. I love you too devotedly to see this unnatural engagement go on. Oh, never in my wildest dreams have I imagined an angel such as you! And am I to live and see you plight your troth to another? And such a man! It would kill me, Effie—it would kill me!"

At these words of his she was roused out of her unnatural calm, and a flood of rose-color rushed to her pure brow.

"I—I must not hear this now!" she whispered.

"My own love, am I so blest as that you could have returned my affection in happier circumstances?"

She did not answer him in words; but her tremulous confusion—the sudden, timid joy in her downcast face, the swift rapture, followed by as rapid a despair, all replied to him.

"Oh, Effie!—oh, my love!—you will not let me lose you?" he whispered, fondly drawing her to him, and resting her fair head on his shoulder.

Then she was recalled to the gulf which must forever divide them; the dark secret which Jaspar Bernard possessed; the impossibility of freeing herself from his power, save at the expense of what would be worse than death to her aged grandparents, at the cost of dishonor to her father's memory.

Even as Sydney's kiss touched her cheek, she shrunk back and whispered, "We must part. In another life only must we meet again!"

There are moments which are more cruel to us than death, and this was one of them to the lovers—moments when a fair, sweet

hope grows dim and dies, and rapture fades into despair.

This was such a moment to Effie and Sydney.

"What!" cried he. "Will you madly promise to love a man who is removed from you in feeling, by every habit of his life, by the whole tone of his thoughts? Do you realize that such a life would be misery too heavy to be borne?"

"Yes, yes—I know it," she murmured; "I know it all."

"Then, oh, listen to me, who love you devotedly. I had said to myself that I should never dare to tell you of my love, but this wild grief has forced it from me. Effie, will you condemn me to despair in the very hour when you have lifted me into rapture by the hope that you could give me your affection?"

"Can I do anything else?" she whispered. "Oh, Sydney! I suffer tortures of which I do not speak."

"You can never marry that dreadful man!"

"I must!" she replied, in a voice so low that he could barely catch the words—"I must! But there will be a way of partial escape."

Sydney started.

"What can you mean, dearest?" he whispered.

"There will be a way of escape," she repeated, in a choked voice, "otherwise I could not live on."

"You would not take your own life, beloved?" he said, struck with sudden and new terror.

"Oh, no, no! And we shall be as much asunder as now. You and I may not see each other; for I must stand at the altar with that man. Oh, Sydney! be silent as the grave. I can explain nothing; and I have spoken these words at a frightful risk. But how could I be quite silent after hearing that—that if things had not been thus, we might have made each other's happiness?"

"Let us still make it. Be courageous enough, dearest, to throw off this mistaken view of your duty. Allow your grandfather to judge—your grandmother."

"Can one person judge for another?" said she. "Oh, Sydney, leave me!"

But he caught her in his arms as she fell fainting there; and the miserable young man was forced to yield to the entreaties of Mrs. Lane (who entered at his hasty summons), that he would spare Effie any further excitement in her agitated state.

"Mrs. Lane, if Effie so much as sees that wretched fellow again it will half kill her. Cannot you send him away from Glenwood?"

Insist on his leaving you, at least for a time," besought Sydney.

"I will—I must!" replied the deeply-moved old lady, as the unhappy young man tore himself from the presence of his beloved—his beloved, who loved him, and yet was to wed another.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. WORTH'S BOARDER.

THE moon rode high in the heavens, and threw its white, cold light upon the Worth cottage, making deep, mystical shadows, and as startling patches of brightness elsewhere.

The drunkard's hut? No; it is unfair to call Phœbe's home by that name in these days.

James Worth is an altered man. All his family are changed too. His wife smiles cheerily, the children are happy and orderly, there are many comforts in the simple house.

Long since the furniture and clothes have been redeemed from the pawnshop; long since has the little garden been made tidy, and the gate put on its hinges.

The rose-bushes are so neatly nailed against the wall, the borders of box are so trim and well kept, that even by moonlight the passer-by can make out that things are well looked after about the place.

In these prosperous days, Mrs. Worth has found another way of earning money.

Now that Phœbe was in service, and her next sister had found a situation, Mrs. Worth thought that she would furnish up the vacant bedroom, and take a boarder during the summer months.

Many of her neighbors did this with cottages no bigger than hers, for the country round was so picturesque that many an artist and tourist was glad to find even a humble room to let.

During the past summer Phœbe's mother had had her spare room tenanted, but it had been empty since the beginning of October, and the little ornaments for the chimney-piece, the best coverlet, and other things, had been carefully put by for another season. To-night the dazzling moonbeams lay athwart the window of the room which was "to let," and made even the white curtain drawn across it visible. A light gleamed behind that curtain; some one was moving about in the bed chamber.

It was about half past eight o'clock in the evening, and little Willie Worth, Phœbe's seven years old brother, peeped from the cottage door every now and then into the lane so flooded by moonlight, to see if his sister was in sight. For now and then Phœbe came to spend an evening at her mother's, and she had said on Sunday she

would be sure to come to night. And at last the little fellow caught sight of her active figure emerging from the shadow, and darted out to meet her. Phœbe caught him in her arms, and gave him a hearty kiss.

"Oh, Phœbe, guess—guess what has happened! Mother is so glad!"

"Then it is good news, whatever it is," answered Phœbe.

"Yes, yes. But guess what it is!" exclaimed the child, squeezing his sister's hand in his childish joy as they walked to the door together.

But she could not guess; and eager to tell what had excited him, Willie called out, "Mother's got a new boarder!"

"A boarder at this time of year!" cried Phœbe.

"Yes; a woman. Mother is so glad. We shall all have new clothes for Easter."

"Welcome, my girl! Give your old father a kiss," cried Worth, as his daughter appeared on the threshold. "Your mother's busy just now, a-waiting on this new tenant of ours."

Phœbe sat down by her father's side, and began to tell him small bits of news about what was going on at the "big house."

"And what about this Mr. Jaspar Bernard? Does your dear young lady mean to have him?" asked Phœbe's father, in a concerned tone.

"She says so, father, and yet she hates him," cried the girl.

"I can't make it out," said Worth, reflectively. "I'm main sorry for it. Somebody ought to prevent it."

"But, who could, father? Her grand-mamma, and the dear old gentleman, too, have tried their best, but nothing can move her. She says she owes it to her dead father."

These confidences were interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Worth, who looked radiant, as Phœbe jumped up to kiss her. "Now you sit down, mother, by the fire. I'll wash up those tea-things while I talk to you. And so you've got a lady-boarder, and in winter too?"

"She's not a lady, my dear, but a well-to-do sort of person, just about the cut of Mrs. Dell, the housekeeper up at your place. What she's come here for, goodness knows, though she says she's been ill, and is ordered quiet and fresh air. But, there, when you see her you'll think she's never had a day's illness in her life, for she's a strong woman to look at. However, I'm glad enough to have her, and she won't be much trouble. We're not used to have to light a fire upstairs, but she'll want one yet awhile, and there's no smoke, so we shall do very well."

And then the talk drifted into other mat-

ters. An hour flew by very rapidly, when the feeble tinkle of a bell made Mrs. Worth start up. "Bless me," she cried, "it's the new boarder! I gave her a hand-bell to ring if she wanted anything, for I can't have her coming down here whatever we may be at."

"I'll go, mother, then I shall see what she is like," exclaimed Phœbe, and forthwith she climbed the wooden staircase which led to the spare room.

"I want some more coal, please, it is such a sharp night," said the stranger, eyeing her landlady's daughter with curiosity. "Are you Mrs. Worth's daughter?"

"Her eldest girl. I'll soon get the coal, ma'am," answered Phœbe.

"What did you think of her, my dear?" whispered her father, as Phœbe returned to the kitchen.

"I don't like her at all!" answered Phœbe, under her breath. Then she took up the coal-scuttle, and again mounted the stairs.

Phœbe made this an opportunity to have a good look at her mother's boarder. She was a tall, big woman, with a consequential air and strong voice, who looked as if she had never been ill in her life.

"The lamp doesn't burn very well. Will you screw it up a bit now that you are here?" said this personage, after Phœbe had replenished the fire.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Phœbe, approaching the small round table for that purpose.

The boarder, Mrs. Philips, sat looking at the fire idly, with her large hands in her lap, but she seemed to have been sewing, for a work-box was open near the lamp. There were some sheets of note-paper and pen and ink on the table, and several photographs huddled together.

As Phœbe smoothed the table-cover, after screwing up the lamp, her quick eye glanced down at the photographs, one of which had half-fallen out of its envelope. What she saw made her suppress a start of surprise. But surely she must have made a mistake? That could not be the likeness of Mr. Jaspar Bernard?

Determined to make sure, the girl pretended to stoop for a pin, and in rising drew nearer to the photograph. Yes; she felt *sure* now that there was Mr. Jaspar's likeness. A good deal surprised, Phœbe said, "Good-night, ma'am," and hurried down-stairs.

"I must be going in another quarter of an hour," said she, as she reseated herself by her father and mother. Little Willie and the rest of the children were now in bed. Phœbe was alone with her parents. "Only think!" remarked she, in a whisper; "I've seen Mr. Jaspar Bernard's likeness in the

new boarder's room. What's her name, mother?"

"Philips. But she can't have anything to do with him, surely?"

"She's got his likeness on her table."

"Well, that is queer now!" exclaimed her father. "Not now I come to think of it, though," added he smiling. "We've got the likeness of the President, but that doesn't make us acquaintances. Our boarder may have lived with some of the Bernard family."

"Oh! Mr. Jaspar is such a common man, father!" cried Phœbe. "He is not fit to sit down to table with Miss Lane, much more to marry her. The more I think of it, the more miserable I am. Live at Glenwood if he was master there I never would! And we all say the same thing; not one of the servants will stay a day in his service. Poor Miss Effie!" concluded she, rising to put on her bonnet.

"I'll come with you to the end of the lane, my girl," said her father; "but don't you go till you're obliged. The quarter of an hour is not up yet."

"That's true, father. I'll stay five or ten minutes longer. I sha'n't be long in running back."

At this moment a noise was heard overhead, the next a heavy step descended the stairs, and then Mrs. Philips, with bonnet and shawl on, appeared in the kitchen.

"It is such a beautiful night that I think I'll take a turn in the moonlight," said she. "You see, I've been ill, and often can't sleep, and I find nothing makes me rest so well as a quick turn before going to bed."

"Well, you've a fine evening, ma'am," said Phœbe's father, rising to open the door, "and you can't very well lose your way."

"Oh, no!" said she, smiling. "I sha'n't be long."

And then she went out into the moonlight.

"I'll just run up and take another look at that photograph!" cried Phœbe, starting from her seat.

She came down-stairs with a disappointed air.

"It's not there," said she, "but I saw something else which makes me certain she has something to do with Mr. Bernard. There was a story-book she'd been reading on the table, and I just opened the book to see what it was, and saw a name half-scratched out on the fly-leaf. It must have been 'J. Bernard,' but I couldn't quite make out."

"You've got this thing into your head, my girl, and so you fancied you made out the letters that spell his name. But s'pose you did, what does that prove? She's been

in service, or had something to do with some of his family, depend upon it."

Phoebe said nothing. She sat down again, and taking up the stocking she had been darning, finished it, and then rose, saying she must go directly.

And then her father put on his overcoat, and accompanied his daughter to the end of the lane.

"Don't come any further. You're tired, father, and here I'm almost in the grounds," said Phoebe.

"Good-night, then, my girl. Come again soon."

"Yes. Good-night, dear father."

And then Phoebe was alone. But she had no fear. In this familiar path, so near the house, too, why should she have a thought of fear?

The girl's light footfall gave no sound upon the grassy pathway. She sent one glance at the brilliant moon overhead, then plunged into the deep shadow of overhanging branches.

The path she had to traverse would bring her to the gates which led up to the back of the mansion at Glenwood, but before she could reach those gates she must pass through one end of the shrubbery. And here Phoebe *did* feel just a shade of timidity; for suppose any one was to pounce out on her from these black shadows! Just in this spot it certainly was lonely; and— What was that?

Phoebe stood still, and listened. A man's voice broke on her ear. Whose? It sounded like the hated Mr. Jaspar's.

"You'll go and spoil all!" said he, angrily. "What need you come here for, bothering?"

Phoebe, breathless and frightened, could not catch the reply.

"I shall manage just as I please. Haven't I said all along that you were to keep at a distance?"

This was the next sentence which reached Phoebe's ears, again in Jaspar's voice.

Fain would she have gone on to the house; but to do so she must pass Mr. Jaspar, and she detested him too much to wish to exchange a word with him.

So she remained quiet, feeling very uncomfortable. She wondered to whom he could be speaking in that tone, and why he was there; but she had heard Hardman say that Mr. Bernard went out in the grounds sometimes to smoke a cigar after dark.

Then more murmurs floated to the girl's ear, but no distinct words, except, "This day week," and "Take care!" repeated menacingly.

Whoever Mr. Jaspar was quarreling with, it was over for to-night. They were separ-

ating, some footsteps receding, others approaching the spot where the girl was in hiding.

All at once a sudden thought shot into Phoebe's brain. She would see whether it was a woman or a man who had been talking to Mr. Bernard; so she went back, still keeping in the shadow, and waited for the person, whoever it might be, to pass into the moonlight.

She had not long to watch. A somewhat heavy tread sounded on the path, and then— Phoebe caught her breath and looked with all her eyes—a woman's bulky form stood in the white patch of light, then disappeared again into the shadow. But that glance was enough for Phoebe; for she had distinguished the tall figure of the big woman who had come to be her mother's boarder—Mrs. Philips.

CHAPTER IX.

PHOEBE'S PLAN.

By some subtle intelligence in the air pervading the household, aided by the fact that Mr. Sydney Fulcombe had called to see Miss Lane, and that she had been found fainting when he had left her, it was fully believed by the servants at Glenwood that their young mistress loved Mrs. Fulcombe's nephew, and that he loved her, and that she had swooned from excess of emotion at parting from him.

"Well she might, too, comparing him with the other," remarked Mrs. Dell, the housekeeper. "A creature that isn't fit to enter our young lady's doors."

Hardman was of this opinion, too, and added his assurance that Mr. Sydney was the gentleman Miss Lane should accept, heiress though she was.

"For he's every inch a gentleman, I will say that; and Mr. and Mrs. Fulcombe, his relations, welcome him to Fulcombe Lodge like as if he was their own son. And he's handsome in looks and pleasant in manners, and in his way of doing things and saying 'em; and our young lady's grandparents would be happy at seeing her say 'yes' to him."

"There isn't a doubt in my mind that she likes him," observed the laundress, Ann Marks.

Phoebe was present at this conversation, and it set her heart beating and her brain at work; for it is not to be supposed that Phoebe had discovered an unexplained tie between her mother's boarder and the hated Jaspar without striving to find out what that tie was.

The few words she had overheard recurred to her: "This day week," and "You'll spoil all."

What was there to spoil? And did "this day week" mean that then Jaspar Bernard was to meet Mrs. Philips again? If so, where? Oh, that she but knew where!

But not to lose a chance, she resolved to go on conjecture, and be, at the same hour, in the same place, in that dark corner of the shrubbery, on that day week.

But, oh! that just for that evening she could manage to be in two places at once! What an opportunity for looking round the room tenanted by Mrs. Philips, to see if any other proof or suspicion of her complicity with Jaspar Bernard was lying about! Her father and mother knew how to hold their tongues where her dear young lady was concerned; but Phœbe was aware that neither were particularly clever in piecing a difficult matter together, if such existed.

She felt the necessity of someone to work with her—some one as devoted to Miss Lane as she was—some one still more clever, and some one who was not timid. So when she heard her fellow-servants declare that Mr. Fulcombe loved her young mistress, it made her heart beat.

Could she secure his help?

Another three days went by, one of which was Sunday, and Phœbe went again to her mother's cottage.

"Does she ever go out in the day, mother?" whispered the girl, after she was seated by the fire, indicating by a sign whom she meant.

"Never, my girl; and that's so odd, keeping in all through the daylight, and creeping out after dark. But she seems very respectable. She's quiet and civil."

"Have you ever seen where she goes, mother?"

"Your father had the curiosity to follow her one night, my dear; but, bless you, she only went to the end of the lane and back. It's just a whim of hers."

"She didn't go to church on Sunday," said Phœbe.

"No; she says she's not strong enough yet."

"Notice if she refuses to go out, mother. Try to persuade her to go with you to Tilford in the farm wagon. Try her, Tuesday afternoon and I'll come up on the chance."

"Whatever is running in your head, my Phœbe? You don't think she's been in prison, do ye?"

"No," said Phœbe; "but I do want to have a look round her room."

"That couldn't tell ye anything!"

But it was settled between them that Mrs. Worth should try her best to induce Mrs. Philips to accompany her to the town of Tilford on the next Tuesday, and that, if she

would consent to go, the light wagon provided with cushions, should be ready to take her.

Now there was a rough and useful pony at Glenwood much used by any one belonging to the place, and the domestics were permitted to drive it into Tilford on necessary business.

Phœbe knew well that her mother could have the pony, and her father had long since been possessed of a light wagon.

So, on the day fixed, Phœbe was at her mother's very early in the afternoon, though not even to her had she told of the meeting in the shrubbery.

"She won't go! I told you, she never went out," exclaimed Phœbe's mother, with an air of disappointment.

Phœbe was still more disappointed than her mother.

"I've tried all manner of persuasion, my dear," continued Mrs. Worth; "but leave that room she will not!"

Phœbe reflected.

"And you won't get her out of the house, if you try ever so hard!" added her mother.

"She says she's come to rest, and that going out is bad for her."

"Well, mother, if *she* won't go, will you take me to Tilford—a little later, so as to get there about four or five o'clock? I've got to go to Fulcombe Lodge, close by."

"Well, to be sure, so I could! We might have tea there, at the cottage, if Mrs. Saxby asks us."

"Yes; and you could leave me there, settle your business in Tilford, and then pick me up."

"So I could, Phœbe. And as they'll know I'm passing, that'll give Mrs. Saxby an opportunity of asking me, if she wishes."

Full of what she meditated, the wise little Phœbe returned to Glenwood and had no difficulty in persuading her mistress to allow her to accompany her mother to Tilford an hour or so later.

"It comes to this," decided Phœbe, as they jogged along. "The week is nearly up. She'll meet him then; and then's my time to have a look round her room. But who's to listen, at the same time, in the shrubbery? I must see what I can do."

Thus, without taking counsel save of her own simple heart, the cottage maiden went with set purpose to Fulcombe Lodge. But she trembled a little as she entered by the back entrance of that place.

"And what do you want, miss? Please to walk in!" said a fine-looking man-servant, meeting her in the back entrance.

"I've come with a message from Glenwood," said Phœbe, blushing both from timidity and from the glance of genuine ad-

miration bestowed on her pretty face by the young fellow aforesaid.

"Whoever you've come to see will be glad to see *you*, I should say," rejoined the smart valet, gallantly. "I should, I know, if you came to see me!"

"Mrs. Saxby knows me. I'm Miss Lane's maid," said Phoebe, still timidly, but aware that she had made no unfavorable impression on this good-looking young man.

"Whew! Miss Lane! Why, my master's sweet on her! Don't you know that? Dying of love for her! She might do worse than say 'Yes,' I can tell you! His men—in the regiment, I mean, my dear—are just devoted to him!"

"Do you think it's true?" asked Phoebe—"true that Mr. Fulcombe *does* care for my young lady?"

"Oh, don't I *know* it, that's all!" returned Mr. Fulcombe's own man, fervently. "I know I wish that you, my dear, would even think of some one half so much, who's only just had the happiness to make your acquaintance—that's me, miss, your most humble servant!"

"I must give my message, please," said Phoebe shyly.

"What can I do for you? Wh do you want to see?"

"Mr. Sydney Fulcombe," answered she.

"He's out, I think. But I don't know. He may be writing his letters in his room. Shall I take up the message?"

"No, thank you. I was told to give it," said Phoebe.

"Wait here, then."

He left her standing by a door which led to the front hall, and she watched him climb the grand staircase, three steps at a time.

While she was waiting there, a stout old lady, wrapped in silk and furs, came into the hall.

"Who are you, young woman?" asked she, pleasantly.

"I'm come with a message from Glenwood, madame," repeated Phoebe.

"Oh, to me, I suppose? I am Mrs. Fulcombe."

"No Mrs. Fulcombe," answered Phoebe, becoming terribly confused; "not to you."

"Who do you want to see then?" asked the old lady.

"Mr. Sydney Fulcombe, madame."

"Why, of course I know you now. You are Miss Lane's maid. Has she sent a message to my nephew?" cried Mrs. Fulcombe, a sudden hope rising in her heart as to that nephew's prospects.

"No, ma'am," replied Phoebe dashing her hopes to the ground.

At this moment, Sydney himself, followed by his man, appeared on the stairs.

"Here is the young person, sir," said Sydney's servant, indicating Phoebe, and disappearing.

His aunt lingered, determined to hear from whom the message came.

"You wanted to see me?" asked he.

"Yes, if you please, sir. I have a message to give you," said Phoebe, courtesying.

Mrs. Fulcombe stood by all the time *She* was not going to budge.

Sydney waited in silence.

Poor Phoebe trembled.

"If you please, sir," she said, timidly, "I am to give the message to you alone."

"Oh, then, of course it *is* from Miss Lane," exclaimed Mrs. Fulcombe, pleased and offended at the same time.

And she swept away, leaving poor Phoebe at length to speak freely.

"Oh, sir," she began, the tears in her earnest eyes, "it is about Miss Lane I want to speak, though I don't come from her, sir. May I be sure that you'll not mention what I've come for, sir?"

"Count on me, my good girl," returned he, still more earnestly than she had spoken.

"I'll trust you, then, sir. Well, you must know that I'd die to serve my mistress. Yes, I think I'd die, as you wouldn't so much doubt, sir, if you knew all she'd saved us from, me and mine. And so we're very unhappy that she—dear young lady!—is made so wretched about Mr. Jaspar.

"And by a chance I've found out that he's keeping something secret, which maybe, if 'twas found out, would frighten him away. Now, mother has a new boarder, a Mrs. Philips, who's only lately come here, pretending she's been ill; and I've seen a photograph of Mr. Bernard on her table, and a book in her room with his name in it; and, the other night, who should I come upon but him and our boarder meeting in the shrubbery at Glenwood by night, secretly. And he says to her, 'You'll go and spoil all;' and then, 'This day week.' And then she slunk away. And when she went out that evening she was pretending she wanted to go out a bit before going to bed, to make her sleep.

"In the daytime she'll never leave the house, not was it ever so; so that it's plain she wishes to hide, or else has something to keep out o' sight. And I want to find out more, sir; and—and if you'd help me—"

"Let me do anything in the world!" interrupted Sydney.

"Oh, sir, thank you. Will you come, the night after to-morrow, to the bit of shrubbery that leads to the back entrance to Glenwood, at half-past nine o'clock punctual? I'll show you just where to stand, and you'll hear all. But I must be looking round her room while

you're in the shrubbery, sir; it'll be the only chance I shall have."

"I'll be there by nine o'clock," cried Sydney. "I'd wait all night to find out what this means."

"Call at Glenwood to-morrow, sir, on some pretense, and I'll be in that part of the grounds by four o'clock to show you whereabouts to take up a position."

"I will not fail."

As he said these words, a door leading to the hall opened, and Mr. Sydney's own man passed through, in time to catch this last sentence.

"That's all, then, sir," said Phoebe; and courtesying, she withdrew.

Now it chanced that Mr. Sydney's own man (who was named Merton) took the opportunity of his master's temporary absence on the following day himself to make a call at Glenwood. He intended to see pretty Phoebe Worth again, and was curious to find out what she wanted with Mr. Fulcombe. Thus master and man alike took the way to Effie's beautiful home. But Mr. Merton started some half-hour after his master, also he went toward the back entrance, not the front.

What was his surprise to perceive the object of his thoughts, Phoebe herself, coming toward his master, who was also in the shrubbery!

Merton, albeit on legitimate business, got out of sight. What right had Mr. Fulcombe to be there, in a part of the grounds not used by visitors, and, above all, what had he to say to Phoebe?

"I shouldn't have thought he'd do an underhand thing like that, and I'll not allow it to go on!" thought Merton, watching from behind the huge trunk of an oak tree, still bare of leaves.

Phoebe came on swiftly, with a frightened air.

Determined to know what passed between them, Merton skulked from tree to tree, treading lightly.

Sure enough, his master approached quite close to the girl, bent down, and they earnestly exchanged a few words.

The interview lasted but a moment, and the only words distinguished by the manservant were, "Just here—to-morrow night—not after a quarter past nine!"

"So, so!" thought he. "I shall make him ashamed of himself before I've done!"

CHAPTER X.

PHOEBE'S SEARCH.

It was now near the middle of March, and the sharpest weather was pretty well over. There was a promise of coming Spring in the woodlands, though as yet all things slumbered.

Effie was going to travel with her grandmother and grandfather almost immediately, and Glenwood was to be shut up during their absence, Mr. Jaspar Bernard being provided with a check sufficient to cover his expenses during the remainder of the year, a period which the harassed girl and her aged relatives were determined to pass without the annoyance of his presence.

As to going to New York, that was out of the question. Effie was far too wretched to go into society there, and Jaspar Bernard would be certain to thrust himself forward wherever they went.

The poor young girl was sadly altered even within the last week.

She dwelt continually on Sydney's avowal of affection for her, and knew that she could respond to it. It had been given her to perceive her Eden, only that it might be withdrawn during the gaze.

Once in the day her sad eyes brightened; once every day the rose-color returned to her cheeks. It was when Phoebe came into her boudoir, bringing a choice bouquet to her mistress, which she would place demurely by her side.

The first time this occurred, Effie asked quickly, "Who has sent me these lovely flowers at this time of the year?"

And Phoebe answered, "We don't know, miss. No message was left."

But there was a message among the flowers.

Hidden between their blossoms, a scrap of paper bore these lines.

"Sundered as I am from thee,
Let these blossoms speak for me!"

After this, Effie did not ask who sent the flowers; but when the bouquet arrived at the same hour each morning, sometime composed only of delicate hothouse roses, always accompanied by some verse or quotation breathing of affection, she said to her maid:

"To-morrow you must not bring me any flowers, Phoebe—nor ever again. I must not accept them now. They must be returned."

"I'll give orders, ma'am," answered Phoebe.

But still the next morning the flowers were sent up to Miss Lane.

"How is this, Phoebe?" asked Effie, seriously.

"If you please, ma'am, the bell is rung, and when Mr. Burton or any of the men go to answer the door, the flowers are there and the messenger gone. Your orders were not neglected, ma'am."

This had been going on ever since the day when Effie had fainted after her interview with Mr. Fulcombe.

And now the night had arrived when Phoebe hoped to make some discovery which might cause Jaspar Bernard to depart.

It was a still night—no blustering winds, no full moon; but it was not very dark, save under the trees.

Phoebe was early at her mother's cottage. She answered Mrs. Philips's bell twice that evening, and was sitting sewing by the kitchen fire when the woman, with cloak and bonnet on, came down-stairs, explaining that she had a fancy for a walk before bedtime.

Phoebe opened the door for her remarking to Mrs. Philips, as she passed out:

"That it was not windy."

"No," answered the woman, little dreaming that the civil, pretty girl was drawing a net round her path.

As soon as she was fairly gone, Phoebe caught up a candle, and went up-stairs.

A very small fire burned in the grate; the lamp was turned down; the room was very neat. There were no photographs this time on the table, but there were two or three books. Phoebe scanned them all, but no "Jaspar Bernard" met her eye.

She next opened the drawers; there were no loose papers nor letters. All the three boxes were strong ones, locked securely.

The girl opened the work-box, but it contained nothing suspicious.

"What are you about, my child?" asked her mother, peeping into the room. "She'll be back and find you here."

Phoebe was at this instant on her knees beside the coal-scuttle, drawing out some torn shreds of note-paper.

Mrs. Philips had thrown them there; there was just a chance that some word written by her would reveal something to give a clue to the relation between people apparently so widely separated as Mrs. Philips and Jaspar Bernard.

"You can read 'em down-stairs! Don't let her catch you here, Phoebe!" entreated her mother.

Phoebe cast another searching look around, and left the room.

There were three scraps of paper. The words on the first were—"your own mother's advice, or you'll rue—"

And on another—"if you get this, it won't be your doing, but—" And on the back the words, "Oh, Jaspar!"

The third slip revealed nothing. Did the others? That name, Jaspar, surely showed that she had been writing to him. But was she his mother? Oh, she could not be! Mr. Bernard's mother had been in her grave many, many years ago.

"I wonder she's gone so long, Phoebe," said Mrs. Worth, at length. "Your father's late, too; he had to go into Tilford this evening."

The clock struck ten.

Phoebe tied on her bonnet reluctantly. She wanted particularly to have Mrs. Philips safely housed again before she passed through the end of the shrubbery, otherwise Phoebe knew she might meet Jaspar Bernard, whom she shrunk from encountering in that gloomy place.

Oh, what had occurred there during the past hour? Had Mr. Fulcombe been able to overhear anything? Had that been the meeting-place, or had she made a mistake, after all?

Of course she would now tell her young lady all, and then she could find out whether Mr. Jaspar had a mother living, and something might turn up that way.

Musing thus, the girl arrived at the entrance to the shrubbery.

She listened.

All was very still.

No sound broke the quiet of the night as she timidly entered the belt of trees.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE SHRUBBERY.

THE fag-end of that belt of trees had been the scene of more than one rendezvous. Three men had bent their steps toward it, and one woman.

The first person to arrive was the valet, Merton, who took up what he judged a good position for overhearing all that his master might say to Phoebe.

Five minutes later Sydney arrived, groping his way to the tree indicated to him yesterday.

He had planted a stake in the ground a few inches to the right of the tree, that he might feel if he had come to the spot, for it was so dark that it was impossible just there to distinguish anything.

"There he is!" thought Merton, hearing footsteps. "I shall never respect him again!"

Once in their place of concealment, both men remained profoundly silent—Sydney, unaware of any one's presence, and anxiously listening for Jaspar's footsteps and the woman's arrival; the valet, intent on recognizing the light footfall of Miss Lane's maid.

Ten minutes passed in this uncomfortable position; then a noise broke the stillness of the night, and a footstep became audible. Whose? was the silent question each of the concealed listeners asked themselves.

It approached rapidly, came quite near, and remained stationary.

"It's not that pretty girl," thought the valet.

"It is that wretched cur!" mused Sydney. Each took the greatest care not to move.

Presently a man's voice (that of Jaspar) breathed cautiously the word "Mother!"

This single word, which revealed so much to Sydney, was unintelligible to Merton.

"Have I wronged him?" thought the latter, mentally referring to his master.

A minute passed. Then Bernard again spoke in very cautious tones:

"Are you there? Speak if you are!"

No answer, and he walked a few steps as if impatiently, then came to a stand-still.

In about three minutes another person was heard at the end of the belt of trees, some one who trod heavily, and who came to a halt in the thickest of the gloom upon the pathway. (Merton and his master had each taken up a position among the trees.)

"Who is it?" asked Jaspar, in a low tone.

And then came the reply, "Don't you know your mother's footstep?"

"Hush!" said Jaspar.

"Oh, it's safe enough here!" returned the woman.

"It's not safe for you to come after me like this!" exclaimed Jaspar, raising his voice a little in his anger. "What good will it do? I've managed pretty well alone, I think at present. She has consented to marry me! Proof enough of my being able to manage my own affairs without your interference!"

"Is this the way you talk, unfeeling boy? But for me you might have gone through life as a poor mechanic! And now!"

"And now I've had the pluck to carry out what you had the brains to think of, old lady! So don't let us begin by quarreling. Here's what you asked for, and remember, we must

not meet till I'm married! You can always write."

"You've got something else to remember, Jaspar. I'm to be invited to Glenwood the very day you return from your honeymoon."

"Bosh! Why need you bother about that now?" he replied roughly.

"Because you may forget me when you're master here!"

"I shall never be master if you follow me about like this. And after I am married you must be pretty careful, I can tell you. We must keep up the story. No confessions then, even when the knot is tied. I want to hold up my head in the town."

"Don't hold it so high as not to see your mother!"

"Is that all you came here for? Who wants to forget you?" said he, angrily.

"Well, I've got my money, so I'll be off!" resumed the woman. "Of course I had to be somewhere in the neighborhood. You said yourself that you might want me to refer to—"

"Well, so I did," answered Jaspar, softening. "And I suppose we're safe enough here. No one can hear us without being close by, and there has not been a sound but your coming, mother."

"No, it's still enough. But about those papers, Jasper! What's the good of keeping 'em now? They were useful enough once, but things being as they are, I say let's burn 'em, for dead men tell no tales."

"Give 'em to me. I'll keep 'em—they're too precious to burn! Think how many things there are in them to prime me! I've got my whole life to live with Effie, and when she gets used to being called Mrs. Bernard Lane, she'll not be so cross, and she'll be sure to question me. Often and often I shall be glad then of a quiet look back among the old gentleman's letters," replied Jaspar.

"Oh, very well. But I'll keep them at present, Jaspar. Good-by. You're in fine style here, while your mother lives in a cottage!"

"Why can't you give me those papers, I say?" cried Jaspar, irritably. "You can have 'em back, if you'll give 'em to me for a bit. Have you got 'em with you?"

"Is it likely I should have such precious papers about me?" she returned.

"Yes; for you said once you never let 'em leave you—that if you went out for ever so short a walk you took 'em with you!"

"Well, I've not got them to-night," said she, doggedly.

"You have—I believe you have; only it's so dark, who's to tell?"

Both parties had raised their tones a little, and, under cover of this, Merton had slid nearer to the voices. Sydney's heart beat wildly, but he did not stir. It was pretty plain to him now that some deep deception had been practiced on her he loved. Oh, to unravel it!

"Now, then," exclaimed Jaspar, "don't you begin a quarrel, mother! I know those papers are in your pocket; give 'em to me, and you shall have 'em back before a fortnight's over."

"They are not in my pocket, Jaspar," said she.

"Then you've hid them somewhere in your dress. Let me have 'em, I say!"

"You shall not have them to-night! I want to look into them again first."

"I will have them! That's plain, now!"

"You shall not!"

Each spoke with fixed resolution and concentrated anger.

"Will you lend 'em to me, without more bother?" asked Jaspar, roughly. "I ask you for the last time?"

"No!" said the woman, fiercely.

"No! Mind, I sha'n't ask you for 'em again—I shall take 'em!"

"You shall not have them!" she repeated, still more resolutely than before.

"That we shall see!"

And here he appeared to seize hold of her.

But now something wholly unexpected occurred. Merton was fired with a sudden inspiration to secure those papers, whatever they might be, on the woman herself. Indeed, the same idea had been burning in Fulcombe's mind, but how was he to compass it, as he supposed, alone—two to one, and in the darkness!

Thus, the only plan which occurred to him was to dog the one who finally carried them off.

But as these thoughts were surging within him, and mother and son were silently struggling for the possession of the papers, Jaspar felt a strong hand laid on him, while at the same instant a shout rung out through the wood:

"Here, sir! I'm here to help!"

Sydney, electrified into action by the voice of his own man, and by the certainty of aid, was swift to grasp, as he believed, his adversary, Jaspar. But, in the darkness, he had taken hold of the woman, Phillips, who was struggling furiously.

There was a wild crash among the bare trees, and the woman alone remained in the hands of her captors.

"We'll get our prisoner housed now, sir!" laughed Merton. "She isn't the person I looked to find here."

"Thank Heaven you were here, Merton!"

That was all they said just then, for the woman, now in desperation, struck out wildly, in the vain hope of escape.

But there was no escape for her. Sydney sent out a loud "Hulloa! Help! help!" which went ringing on the night air; and then Merton gave another and another shout, which sounded far and wide, startling two grooms at Glenwood, who happened, just then, to be crossing the stable-yard, and who ran to the spot whence the cry came.

"Where are ye?"

"Here! Bring a light!" was the reply.

Another five or six minutes, and Mrs. Worth's boarder, defiant, wild, desperate, was secured in the servants' quarters at Glenwood.

"It is to us you must now deliver up those papers which you refused to your son!" said Sydney sternly.

"I shall not give them up—they are mine! No one has a right to take family papers from me!" said she, as resolutely as she had spoken to Jaspar.

"We have overheard a plot formed by you and your son to entrap Miss Lane into a marriage with an impostor—for he is an impostor!"

Mr. Bernard's wife died long ago. Therefore, we shall get a warrant for the delivery of those papers. You will be searched by a female officer. Meantime, you will be guarded here till the arrival of the proper authorities," replied Sydney.

"Promise me my boy shall have twelve hours to get out of the way, you shall have the papers, and I will speak out."

"I will consult Miss Lane," replied Sydney, "and bring you her answer."

CHAPTER XII.

A WOMAN'S SCHEME.

EFFIE still tried to comfort her old grandfather and grandmother; but the comfort they required was to know that *her* peace of mind was restored, and that relief she was powerless to offer them.

The preparations for their journey, the looking forward to be all three together again without Jaspar Bernard for some months, when they should leave Glenwood, had helped the sorrowful trio to get through the last sad days.

To-night, as they sat together (Effie with her hand in that of the aged Mr. Lane, while, from time to time, her eyes rested lovingly on her grandmother), each strove to forget for a few brief moments that all was not with them as it had been a month or so gone by.

Suddenly the door of their private sitting-room was thrown open, and some one entered hastily.

Effie rose in disturbance. Had Jaspar Bernard intruded here?

But it was not Jaspar Bernard who advanced into the apartment, nor did he wear so noble a front, nor a face so agitated with contending emotions as the man who came rapidly to her side. Effie uttered a faint exclamation, and sunk back in her seat, for it was Sydney Fulcombe who was there before her, and what meant the new light in his eyes—the gleam of rapture there?

Old Mr. Lane put out his hand cordially, even while saying to him aside:

"I am afraid I must take you away with me to my study."

"No, no! Oh, Mr. Lane, no; for I think I am the bearer of good news!"

Effie turned to him. What news could be good news to her, save Jaspar Bernard's departure, and that was entirely un hoped for?

Her beautiful eyes gave him a glance of mute but hopeless inquiry, as when we ask a thing mournfully knowing that there cannot be for us the answer that we wish to hear.

"I feel what you would say to me," said Sydney, quitting her grandfather's side, and taking her hand in his. "You would tell me that I cannot bring you the sort of news you would have; but it is even that which I come to announce."

She trembled visibly.

"The news I would have?" she faltered, clinging to his arm unconsciously.

"Yes. You wish for nothing so much as the departure of that impostor, Jaspar Bernard—for he is an impostor. Your devoted maid, Phoebe Worth, has been the means of his dis-

comfiture, and he is gone, dearest. He has fled, fearing punishment at harsher hands than yours—those of the law."

"Gone?" was all she could falter. "Is that indeed true?"

"Quite true, my Effie. The man's mother is in custody."

"His mother?" cried Effie, in amazed bewilderment. "But Mr. Bernard's wife died years ago."

"And does not that stamp him an impostor, my own love? This man's mother is here, imploring you to grant her coward son but twelve hours' grace before you send the officers of justice after him, on which condition she promises a full confession."

"Then I am rescued, indeed?" faltered she; and this time fell fainting from joy instead of misery.

They carried her to her room, soothing her (on her return to consciousness) with the assurances that all her cause of fear was over, and while her grandmother sat by her side holding her rescued darling's hand and weeping for joy, Mr. Lane and Sydney Fulcombe were dealing with the woman.

Mr. Lane took it upon himself to say that extreme rigor would not be dealt out to her on full confession being made, and the papers being produced.

"There they are, then!" she said, shrinkingly, drawing some papers from her bosom.

There were not many—a dozen, perhaps in all—and all proved to be letters, some signed "Jaspar Bernard," evidently sent to Effie's father during the lifetime of the latter.

Several of them referred to the loneliness he felt after the death of his wife, thus bearing testimony to the real Mrs. Bernard's decease long since.

"Now, who are you?" asked Mr. Lane, addressing the woman, after a hasty glance at these letters.

"I'm the nurse who attended Mr. Angus Lane in his last illness, that's who I am!" she replied, defiantly. "There, if I am to confess, let me be quick about it! It's not too pleasant to say out against myself. I did it for that son of mine who isn't too fond of me, after all!"

She sighed heavily, and continued:

"Well, I was the nurse called in to attend the young lady's father here, Mr. Angus Lane, and often and often he'd ask me to read to him. Among other things I read him letters from his dear friend, Mr. Bernard, who was in ill-health himself, and who mentioned in one of his letters that he sadly needed a good nurse, such as his friend was fortunate enough to possess, and begged Mr. Angus to let him know if ever she was at liberty.

"Afterward I made use of this, for when Mr. Angus died I offered myself as nurse to Mr. Bernard, who gladly engaged me, and with him I lived till his death—a matter of five years ago."

"What! is Mr. Bernard dead?"

"La, yes! else how could my son and me have come forward with our story? I was the confidential nurse, I saw all the letters, and answered those of intimate friends, so I knew all about

the yearly valentine, and took care to keep up the practice of sending it. How did I manage about the handwriting? Well, that was easiest of all, as, for the three years before his death, Mr. Bernard had made me write for him, and had explained that his eyes were failing. The old gentleman had no near relations; he died abroad, and intrusted me with a packet of his dear friend's letters, sealed up, to return to that dear friend's daughter at Glenwood. Now I unsealed those letters and read 'em all, and there were some among 'em that read as if Mr. Bernard had saved Mr. Angus Lane from the consequences of something he had done very wrong. I saw they could be easily used to frighten his young daughter, and get a good deal out of her. Remember, I was present at the death-bed of her father, heard the promise she made to him, and knew that she was a great heiress.

"Now I had an only son, and I came to her with a clever story."

"What story?" asked Sydney, in his sternest tones.

"Well, we made her believe that what those expressions of gratitude referred to, was that Mr. Bernard had shielded Mr. Angus Lane from a charge of bigamy! So, to save her father's good name, and her old grandfather and grandmother the trouble of hearing such a story (which she was pretty sure would kill them), the young lady consented to marry my son, who she was made to believe was young Mr. Jaspar Bernard, a person who, in fact, never existed.

"But, bless you! if the young lady had dared to tell her relations the story, they'd soon have sifted out the truth. We made sure, however, she never would, and easily imposed on her with false certificates and some real letters. You see, my position as nurse for years, in both families, had put me up to so much that I could prime my son at every point."

The aged Mr. Lane was speechless at this awful disclosure of deceit, and Sydney's face betrayed his scorn and horror as he said, sternly:

"Go on to the end!"

"Miss Lane will tell you the rest. She knows what we talked her into believing. We told her her father had secretly married a Miss Annie Minworth, from compassion, and showed her some two or three letters of his to a young lady of that name. But these letters were carefully manufactured—her father never saw a line of them."

The woman drew a deep breath, and went on hoarsely:

"Let the young lady finish the story. She was made to believe that her father soon parted from his wife, or rather, his wife from him, and then went to Chicago, where she was persuaded to settle with a rich uncle who adopted her, and that she died only five years ago, thus making the second marriage illegal; and that Jaspar Bernard made the real wife's acquaintance in New York, and was kind enough to hide his surprise and hold his tongue at a critical moment, and that for *this* reason Mr. Angus Lane was eternally grateful. I was safe in inventing my own story, for I knew the real sense of his

gratitude, and that Mr. Angus had never told his own people about it, so I could say pretty well what I liked."

"And what *was* the real cause of that gratitude?" asked Sydney.

"Well, it was this. If Mr. Bernard hadn't held his tongue at one particular time, Mr. Angus Lane would have had a hard thing to remember all his life and would never have been happy again! When his eldest sister was dying, she longed to see the man she was engaged to once more, to bid him good-by. He was in New Orleans just then, so was Mr. Angus (for they were in the same regiment), and a silly, young, unscrupulous brother-officer had laid a bet of five hundred dollars that he would make Lane send his friend a challenge, much as he was known to dislike dueling.

"This young man then trumped up a story about Kinmore, the man who was engaged to Mr. Angus's sister, and told Mr. Angus that he knew Kinmore was carrying on a correspondence with the daughter of a ruffian, and that if he watched he would see him meet her that evening. Mr. Angus was furious, and determined to expose him. He watched, and actually did see the girl take the road indicated at the hour named, she having been induced to go by a concocted tale of her real sweetheart being there to walk out with her.

"The man who had made the bet had as artfully trumped up a story against Angus Lane, which he detailed to Kinmore, making the latter believe that he (Angus) was about to use his influence to break off the engagement between him and his sister. In fact, the silly young fellow, having made his bet, went all lengths to win, not having a stiver to pay if he lost it.

"Both young men, once so friendly, were thus hot with anger. Mr. Angus Lane wrote the challenge, asked his brother-officer, Bernard, to be the bearer of it and to officiate as his second the following morning. Bernard attempted to reason with his friend in vain. Finding this, but aware that his anger would cool, Bernard received the challenge and walked away to Kinmore's rooms, but merely paid an ordinary visit, retaining the cartel in his pocket, and keeping a profound silence about it.

"On the morrow, Mr. Angus and his second were punctually at the meeting-place, but it is needless to say the duel did not come off, as the challenge had never been given.

"Then Jaspar Bernard confessed the truth, insisting at the same time on a full inquiry into the tale in circulation before he quarreled with the man who was to be his brother-in-law.

"Declaring that he would never speak to Bernard again, Angus Lane rushed straight to Kinmore's rooms, and found the latter in an agony of distress, and hastily starting for the North, whither he had been summoned by telegram. His betrothed had been seized with fever, and entreated to see him to say a last adieu, and that he would bring dear Angus with him. But for Jaspar Bernard's silence, Angus Lane might have shot his best friend, and poor Miss Lane on her death-bed have hoped in vain for her betrothed. Mr. Angus's gratitude was warm in proportion to his anger, though not so

fleeing. He also believed that Mr. Bernard had saved him from undying remorse. The painful circumstance was never breathed to his father and mother, as they had a horror of dueling, added to which Jaspar Bernard enjoined strict silence as the only way in which his friend could thank him. And so the matter was hushed up, and I knowing it all from what passed in the letters between the friends—letters which all fell into my hands—made my own tale to suit my own purpose. I was nearly successful! My boy might have been master of Glenwood!"

"But now a prison will be your doom, and a life of constant evasion and shifting awaits your son, even at the best," remarked Sydney.

The woman groaned.

"They'll not take him, I do hope!" she said.

They removed her in custody; her evil career was to be stopped in future; but they spared Effie all details of this needful prosecution, and only spoke words of thankfulness and joy to her and her dear grandmother.

With what relief and profound happiness the fair girl opened her eyes to the light of the succeeding day.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW IT ENDED.

WE have now little more to do than to speak of Sydney and Effie's wedding.

This ceremony took place with all due honors at Glenwood, the following St. Valentine's Day, the marriage having been at first fixed for the previous autumn, but deferred, partly on account of dear old Mrs. Lane, who was recovering from an attack of illness, and partly from Mr. Lane's desire that Sydney should withdraw from the army before he wedded Effie.

And thus it happened that Effie was married, after all, on a most appropriate day, the fourteenth of February.

As if to grace the bridal, the sun shone bravely, the wind blew soft, the birds sung, and the joyful clangor of bells was in perfect unison with the weather.

Effie, with complete happiness shining from her eyes, and deepest content in her heart, set off her wedding robe as only a lovely, happy bride could do.

Seven fair bridesmaids walked behind her to the altar of the beautiful little church near Glenwood, each maiden carrying a large nosegay composed entirely of white violets and maiden-hair fern. The bride's bouquet was all of the choicest white roses, also interspersed with delicate sprays of fern.

Old Mrs. Lane, now entirely recovered from her late illness, was beaming with delight. Her dear granddaughter had accepted a gentleman whom she devoutly believed would make her darling happy, and the gentle old lady asked no more.

It was the grandfather who gave away the bride, and he, too, looked perfectly happy and satisfied. The old couple were still to make their home with Effie, and to inhabit the south wing of the fine old mansion at Glenwood.

And so there were no partings, but all was joy. And Mr. and Mrs. Fulcombe were there, looking their bravest; and so many more guests, that the pretty little church overflowed with the numbers who had come to grace Effie's bridal.

But who was that pretty girl, who looked almost as happy as the bride herself, and by whose side a handsome young fellow in spruce attire assiduously kept his place? Why, this was no other than Phoebe—Phoebe, who was herself engaged to be married to Merton, the valet, as was natural. Neither of them meant to quit the service of Mr. and Mrs. Fulcombe; and if Mr. Fulcombe senior leaves his nephew the Lodge, with another country estate on his hands, there will be plenty of employment for Phoebe and her husband.

But their future is already provided for through Effie's and Sydney's gratitude to the devoted girl who had had the joy of saving her young mistress from life-long unhappiness.

Ring out bravely, sweet bells, and let the bridal pair catch one more musical peal ere their carriage whirls them away.

Long life and much happiness to them both!

THE END.

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